

Fun and Friendship on Columbus Day in Columbus, G-A

By Allan Hill



Plus a big dose of information at the GSRA Annual Meeting at the Historic Iron Works at the Columbus Trade and Convention Center. With beautiful weather and a vibrant downtown Columbus, the 2023 GSRA Annual Meeting exceeded all expectations. Laretta Hannon lived up to her billing as the “The Funniest Woman in Georgia” as she kept the crowd of over 150 GSRA members laughing with tales of growing up in Warner Robins with a crazy and eccentric family. Russell Carlson, Commissioner of DCH, gave us important information about the challenges DCH faces this year. Louis Amis, Director of SHBP, gave us the latest updates on open enrollment. He emphasized that State retirees **should never** enroll in any Medicare Advantage program other than what is offered by SHBP at risk of losing SHBP coverage permanently.

In a different type of presentation from ERS, Danielle Templeton, Director of Communications and Outreach, tipped her hats to retirees by offering some very practical tips for financial health and happiness. Executive Director Jim Potvin was unable to attend the meeting, but he did send an excellent video of his interview with investigative reporter Dale Cardwell of TrustDALE called “Protecting Retirees from Scams.” The video warned of numerous scams, how to spot them and how to protect oneself from them.

The Annual Meeting offered some great workshops, with everything from legal information on wills, how to take better pictures with a cell phone, diabetes awareness, and more. The opening reception gave attendees a chance to catch up with long-time friends, make new acquaintances, nosh on some delicious appetizers, enjoy some beer and wine, listen to our favorite troubadour Josh Carson, and enjoy this: [Allan Hill sings the case for a COLA!](#)

While the Annual Meeting is GSRA's one chance to bring together members from all over for fun and fellowship every year, it is also mandated by our bylaws to be the annual business meeting and the election of officers and P&O Board members. The results of the election were as follows:

President – Robert Riddle Treasurer – Harold Grindle Secretary – Allan Hill
At-large Board members for 2-year terms – Marlene Autry, Lorr Elias and Bill Lucas.

Finally, as is the case every year, the Meeting ended with the drawing of winners for all of the excellent door prizes. Thanks to all the local chapters who donated some wonderful door prizes, and to the wonderful people who won them. Congratulations to Janis Tidwell for winning the One Year Membership Dues Drawing!

If you ask anyone who attended this year, the response would be that it was a great meeting. And it really was. We look forward to doing it again next year!

Many thanks to Gloria Coker, Cindy Tharpe and all the members of the Columbus Chapter for their help at the Annual Meeting at the Columbus Convention Center. Thanks to Sandra Kelley, Carla Kirby, and Judy Bryson for their hard work and dedication in securing some wonderful door prizes from around Columbus and Muscogee County. Thanks also for their help in stuffing the swag bags, and for the terrific decorations and center pieces in the main ballroom they provided. It's the commitment and dedication of our local members that made the Annual Meeting successful and makes GSRA strong. Hats off to them all!

Thanks to our Annual Partners, UnitedHealthcare and Anthem, to our sponsors AMBA, Cigna, AARP, and BMG Money, and exhibitor Devereaux Advanced Behavioral Health, for making the meeting possible. Thanks to the terrific team of the Annual Meeting Planning Committee – Kip Mann, Allan Hill, Rhonda Floyd, and Laura Pike – for making the meeting happen.



L-R: Mayor Skip Henderson, III welcomes the group to Columbus; Laretta Hannon entertains the crowd, then signs copies of her book.



Allan Hill goes over the meeting agenda with attendees on Monday.



L-R: Danielle Templeton ERS Director of Communications and Outreach, DCH Commissioner Russell Carlson, SHBP Director Louis Amis and Legislative Committee Chair Chuck Freedman.

Members' Continuing Hard Work with Legislators Shows Promise

By Chuck Freedman

October saw many GSRA members meeting with and otherwise contacting legislators. These included Lt. Gov. Jones, Senate Appropriations Chair Tillery, and several other senators and representatives. Legislators are universally expressing greater sympathy for ERS retirees and willingness to help us financially. Nothing specifically has been mentioned to us, but the size of possible appropriations is higher than we have heard since GSRA was founded. Funding is certainly available with more than \$10 billion surplus revenues.

We have heard that possible uses for this funding could include paying down unfunded liabilities as well as additional COLAs. The legislative team in particular has informed legislators that paying down liabilities is wonderful for the long-term health of our pension fund, but that it will do little to provide critically needed relief for us in the short term. We continue to specify that our goal now and forever is to reinstate our annual 3% COLAs.

Find your Georgia Legislators

Use this link to easily determine your current state legislators by entering your address.
[Who Represents Me?](#)

SHBP Open Enrollment Reminder

This year's Retiree Option Change Period will end on November 3. For more information on the Retiree Option Change Period, you may access the State of Georgia website using this link: [Click HERE](#)



Judy Bryson appointed President Elect

Going into the 2023 Annual Meeting, we did not have a nominee or volunteer to serve as President-Elect for the 2024 Board term. Following the meeting, current at-Large Board member, Judy Bryson, from the Columbus/West Georgia Chapter, has agreed to serve in that position.

According to our Bylaws, unfilled Officer and Board member positions may be filled by Board appointment. At the October 19, 2023 Board Meeting, we had the pleasure of making that appointment by unanimous vote of the Board.

Judy retired in 2017 from the Department of Labor, where she served in a number of leadership positions. Since joining GSRA, she also has provided leadership to the West Georgia chapter, serving as Vice President and Treasurer.

We are appreciative of Judy's willingness to take on additional responsibilities at the Board level. Please join in welcoming Judy as President-Elect.



Donate to GSRA Legal Fund

GSRA's Legal Fund was established as a dedicated legal fund in the event that leadership, on behalf of its members, ever has to retain legal counsel. The fund will be used to cover all appropriate legal fees related to ensuring that retiree benefits are not reduced or eliminated. Every donation makes a difference. For more information and to donate to this fund click [HERE](#).



Top of Mind: At the End of Your Comfort Zone

By Beverly Littlefield

At our Annual Meeting in Columbus several weeks ago, our Legislative Team reviewed our advocacy work over the last year and the progress we've made towards seeing the re-instatement of the annual 3% COLA. After the team's report, I mentioned to the members present that despite the effectiveness of our team, our members, too, are integral to our advocacy work as well.

So I'll try to get right to the point and be brief: Our statewide membership is the face of GSRA. It is your voices that we represent collectively, but the Legislative Team needs your active participation to make your voices heard by legislators directly.

We issue occasional Action Alerts as an organized communication on specific issues, but we need for all our members to establish and maintain communications with their legislators and the Executive Branch directly. They need to know that you expect them to work on your behalf on issues of concern to you. Remember, you elect them. They need to care about what you think.

Recently I read quotes from two authors that seem to be instructive here -

"Change begins at the end of your comfort zone." [Ray T. Bennett]

and

"Most Americans have no confidence in their ability to influence change." [Sam Daley-Harris]

Members say they are reluctant to write or call their legislators or the Governor's office, because they "just wouldn't know what to say" and that "it probably wouldn't do any good anyway." The comfort zone protects us from "risk." But there is no risk in letting your elected officials know your concerns. Staying silent is the greater risk, because they then can say they haven't heard anything from their constituents. Now is the time for every member to find your voice and words and tell your legislators what you expect them do to help reinstate our COLA.

It is time for all of us to get out of our comfort zone. Find your own words. Don't worry about the spelling and grammar. Tell your story.



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Let our legislators know what we expect of them and communicate with them, not just when GSRA issues an Action Alert, but continuously throughout the year. All year. Every year. Until the COLA is re-instated. When your legislative team asks legislators what more can the GSRA do, they almost uniformly say something along the lines of “your members need to become more active in communicating with us. We pay attention to what our constituents say and little to no attention to silence.” We can't tell you often enough that your communication with your legislators and the governor is critical.

And, by the way, if your legislators are already supportive, thank them and ask them to keep working on your behalf. They need to know that you appreciate them.

Your frame of mind is what's holding you back, not your lack of knowledge. If you don't have any confidence in your ability to make change happen, our Legislative Team can't compensate for that. Our core Team does believe that we can make change happen and we've seen change happen. That's why we keep doing what we do, year after year.

But a handful of people in Atlanta can't do it alone. Never has it been more important than now for every GSRA member to be an active member of the Team and to embrace the confidence that we can influence the outcome.

Local Chapter News

CSRA of Augusta Chapter

The CSRA Chapter met on October 17 at Bath Gardens, 3855 Bath-Edie Road in Blythe, GA. Chapter President Clara Brown welcomed the fifteen members in attendance and one guest. After presenting a summary from the last meeting, the treasurer's report was made by Beverly Martin.

Clara reviewed items that were discussed during the GSRA Board meeting. Budget proposals are due in November. The chapter will not have a meeting in December. A Saturday morning breakfast was planned for December 9 for those who want to since two retirees are unable to attend weekdays.

An Annual Meeting report was given by Barbara Lariscy. She highlighted items from the program and encouraged all to try to attend in 2024.

Membership Chair Sandra Schumann reported on the status of the CSRA-GSRA Logo, promotional banner, marketing membership and social media. Sandra introduced the speaker, Jim Brady, Executive Director at Bath Gardens. At the completion of the presentation, Mr. Brady offered free guided tours of the gardens.

The chapter meets on the third Tuesday each month, next meeting date November 21 at 1pm at the Richmond County Health Department, 950 Laney Walker Blvd, Augusta. The speaker will be Brandon Warrick from the Suicide Council in Columbia County.



Some of the members of the Augusta/CSRA Chapter attending the October meeting at Bath Gardens



Augusta/CSRA Chapter members pose with the cannon

Northeast Metro Chapter

Sadie Rogers reports that Mike Murdock, a past president of the Northeast Metro Chapter, and several former members gathered to make plans and reunite with other local GSRA members and new retirees in the Gwinnett County area in hopes the chapter might become active again. The group realizes that the GSRA needs our members to become more active as we advocate for cost-of-living increases for our pensions and to ensure our healthcare benefits remain affordable

and adequate for us in our retirement years. The Northeast Metro Atlanta local chapter consists primarily of members living in and around Gwinnett, Barrow, Hall, Jackson, and Walton Counties.



Northeast Metro Chapter members met to discuss reviving the chapter

Southwest Georgia Chapter

The Southwest Georgia chapter met on October 18th at Albany State University's West campus. Twenty-one attendees were present. Mr. Gary Lamar, a local attorney who dedicates a significant portion of his law practice to Probate Court matters, presented the program. He discussed estate administration, wills, power of attorney and advance directives. The next chapter meeting is planned for January 17th.



Southwest Georgia Chapter members attending the October meeting

Tri-County Chapter

The Tri-County Chapter held its fourth quarter meeting on October 24th in the “Party Room” at Doodlum’s Barbecue & Fruit Stand in Woodbury with twenty eight in attendance. The meeting began at 11:30 AM with an opening prayer. Everyone enjoyed a delicious lunch and fellowship. Lieutenant Carl White and Investigator Christopher Stevers of the Meriwether County Sheriff’s Office shared information related to frauds and scams and how to protect oneself from falling victim by sharing examples of common scams affecting seniors and tips on how to avoid them. The next chapter meeting is tentatively planned for Tuesday, January 30th back at Doodlum’s Barbecue Restaurant in Woodbury.



Tri County Chapter members getting tips on avoiding frauds and scams from the Meriwether County Sheriff’s Office



Special Offer for GSRA Members

Cirque du Soleil ECHO

Under the Big Top – Atlantic Station, November 5 - January 21, 2024


Cirque du Soleil’s 20th Big Top show brings bold new visuals and a unique aesthetic on tour. Packed with vibrant characters, inspiring music, astounding lights and projections, and never-before-seen acrobatic feats, ECHO invites audiences on a journey through a universe of color, wonder, and infinite possibilities.

GSRA Family/Friends Offer: Click [HERE](#) to save up to 20% off select seats/dates. For groups of 10+, you can save 25% and reduced handling fees by contacting Michael.Ciaccia@cirquedusoleil.com for details.

Welcome new members!


SEPTEMBER			
Name	County	Name	County
Susan Allmond	Toombs	Wyonia McCall	Toombs
Danny Allmond	Toombs	Robert McCall	Wayne
James Durrence	Tattnall	Patricia Merritt	Chatham
Cheryl Durrence	Tattnall	Zenobia Mitchell-Jones	Rockdale
Sandra Durrence	Tattnall	Barry Morgan	Cobb
Stansa Harris	Tattnall	Catherine Roberts	Evans
Vonnie Harris Jr.	Candler	Tony Sapp	Pierce
Barbara Johnson	Toombs	Robert Sibert	Montgomery
Charles Kennedy	Tattnall	Edwin Sikes	Toombs
Janene Kennedy	Candler	Shelly Southerland	Monroe
Frances King	Pickens	L.D. Toby Jr.	Toombs
Ron Lanier	Pierce	Lucille Washington	Monroe
Barbara Long	Appling	Theawander Williams	Toombs
Melba McAvoy	Paulding	Vicki Winkfield	Toombs





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GSRA

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LoansforRetirees offers reliable, affordable on-line installment loans to help in times of need, **regardless of your credit history.**


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*Fixed simple interest rate: 34.71% per year with a one-time fee of \$49.00. For example, a \$3,000.01 loan repaid in 26 installments over 26 months, the APR will be 35.95% and the approximate monthly payment will be \$170.00 (assumes a loan execution date of 06/01/2023). Other terms and conditions apply, and your loan may vary depending upon your loan execution date, actual payroll deduction schedule, etc. Must be employed for at least 1 year with the employer to be eligible to apply. Not all applicants will qualify for a loan. Loan is based on an agreement between the borrower and BMG Money, Inc. The Georgia State Retirees Association is not responsible for any financial aspects of LoansforRetirees.



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