

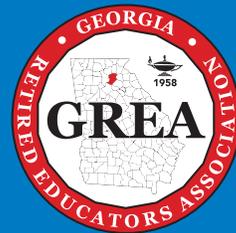
THE GREA BULLETIN

JOURNAL OF NEWS AND REFLECTIONS FOR RETIRED EDUCATORS OF GEORGIA

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GAINESVILLE, GEORGIA

SPRING 2024



Back in Time is BACK!!

GREA 64th Annual Convention Entertainment



Back in Time was formed in the summer of 2009 and has become one of the best “horn” bands around featuring the best of beach and soul and rock ‘n roll. The core of the band came from veterans of the 1960’s and 1970’s rock ‘n roll scene from around Athens and northeast Georgia. The Axemen, the Athens Rogues and Cloud Nine helped form the nucleus of Back in Time. With the influx of a young talented lead singer, two trumpets, a saxophone and trombone, Back in Time was born.

Taking songs from the original artists of the 60’s, 70’s and beyond, the band has put together arrangements that are genuine to the original recordings. From Elvis to Michael Bublé, The Platters to The Doobie Brothers, Jackie Wilson to James Brown, and General Johnson to Chicago, the band features great horns, great vocals, and a dynamite rhythm section. Arrangements by arranger Tom Wallace (arranger for the UGA Redcoat Band) and the late Chuck McKissick (Back in Time founding drummer) highlight the talents of the band.

Band members are Jonathan (JJ) Jackson - lead singer; Bob Cowles - saxophones; Adam Hayes - trumpet; Michael Crook - trumpet; Rory Crook - trombone; Mercer Crook - keyboards; Allen Beach - guitar; John Harriman - bass guitar; Mike Mauldin - drums; Glenn Brown - background vocals; and Jim Black - percussion.

A Message from the President

Joe Boland, President



Joe Boland

This is my last letter for the Bulletin as President of GREA. It has been a lot of fun. I am submitting this letter on February 9th. There is still a lot of work to do and places to visit plus plans for the Convention are developing nicely.

I have loved reciting the poem by Lester Dean about Georgia. I have enjoyed visiting places and seeing things that I have heard of and never heard of. Here is a partial list (to be continued). I saw the Statue of Liberty in McRae. I stood at the foot of the Draketown obelisk. I ate boiled peanuts in Eastman. With the visit to Louisville, I have been to all 5 capitals of Georgia. I drove through Dawson, birthplace of my favorite singer, Otis Redding. I stood at the spot near Fitzgerald where Jeff Davis was captured. I've seen the skyscraper in Dublin. I have seen Dickey Farms in Musella. I've seen a sunset over the marshes of Glynn. I rode through the winding roads of north Georgia with Jesse Hunter at a high rate of speed. I have seen huge pecan groves and peach orchards in South Georgia. I have learned that everything above Macon is north Georgia. I have eaten at Chick-fil-As all over the state. I have met Monica Pearson Kaufmann. Louis Frank Tompkins gave me a GREA bus hat in Macon.

Some things about Dr. Sloan:

1. He was Principal of the elementary school where he was a student.
2. He has served as our Executive Director for 18 years.
3. He is a graduate of Gainesville High School.
4. He was a graduate of UGA and attended both national championship games.
5. He was in education for 38.5 years, principal for 32 years.
6. Teams at his school won 3 state championships.
7. His wife, Janice, retired as a Media Specialist in Hall County. They have a son and daughter and two granddaughters.
8. He loves a breakfast biscuit from Loretta's.
9. He has told me the same joke 4 times.
10. He hired Johnny Smith, who taught in the same classroom his entire career, to work for GREA. They worked together for 18 years.

A Word from the President-elect

by Shirley Grant, President-elect



Shirley Grant

Welcome 2024. Spring is just around the corner and as for me and my house, I welcome it sooner than later. My old bones and joints do not like 8 degrees weather. I surely hope that those weather forecasters and the groundhog are correct when he didn't see his shadow. But as the saying goes, "It Is What It Is." Thus far 2024 is really moving fast and has been quite busy for me. As president-elect I must stay focused on the duties of this office, yet at the same time, I have been preparing and planning for the upcoming convention in May. Many major decisions and appointments must be made months in advance. Therefore, with each day's activities, I need to be positive in my ideas and thoughts. As a matter of fact, I came across these twelve ideas for positive thinking and I would like to share these with you. (1) The past cannot be changed. (2) Opinions don't define your reality. (3) Everyone's journey is different. (4) Things always get better with time. (5) Judgements are a confession of character. (6) Overthinking will lend to sadness. (7) Happiness is found within. (8) Positive thoughts create positive things. (9) Smiles are contagious. (10) Kindness is free. (11) You only fail if you quit. (12) What goes around comes around. Since our last conference, we have lost some dear friends/members of our GREA family, and I offer my sincere condolence to your family. Also, I would like to give a Shout Out to Dr. Bill Sloan, who continued to go to the office every day despite not being able to speak in his natural tone. However, those Whispers still spoke volumes for GREA. The Winter Governing Board meeting will be held in Columbus, GA in March for the first time, and I am looking forward to a great time as we meet to carry out the business of GREA. As I stated earlier, with everything going on around us, let's try to stay positive, Live every moment, Laugh every day, and Love with all of our heart! See you in Columbus and later in Athens for the convention.

Beneficiaries...Do You Know that You Know?

by L.C. (Buster) Evans, Ed.D.



Buster Evans

Happy New Year to our GREA friends! We hope that the beginning of 2024 has been great for you and your families. As I prepare this article, our legislature is back in session, and life both here at TRS and downtown at the Capitol is busy, fun, and even encouraging as we work with policy makers that make the laws which impact us as citizens. That world, though, is not what I want to share with you about in this article. I do want to say a huge "thank you" to our GREA Leadership

and friends who continue, even in retirement, to advocate for public education in Georgia. Your work does make a difference.

I want to spend a few moments making sure you know for absolutely sure that you know what will happen to your retirement benefit once you are no longer on this earth! It seems that several times each year, we end up finding out that one of our beneficiaries has passed away, and one or more family members are disappointed to learn they were not the named beneficiary. There can be several reasons for that reality taking place. Sometimes it could have been the lack of communication within the family, sometimes it could be unrealistic expectations, and sometimes it could be a failure for the retiree to have updated their beneficiary information as they would have otherwise possibly intended. Sometimes, however, we just don't know what a retiree may or may not have been thinking when they identified their beneficiary.

The reality is, we want to make sure that our retirees' intentions are carried out within the appropriate provisions of our retirement laws, and one of the most important steps is making sure the beneficiary listed in their account is who they intend for it to be! That can be done through several really easy ways. First, when someone becomes a TRS member, they should always identify who they want to be the beneficiary. As time goes on through life, though, it is possible that one's needs and/or intentions might change! Getting married may mean adding a spouse as beneficiary is the best choice. In the future, it may mean adding a child or children as beneficiaries. Keeping this information up to date is so important as a member accumulates a cash value and/or benefit eligibility once they are invested with 10 years of service.

The example I will give is that should a member work for several years and then pass away, they might have a cash value of several thousand dollars that would go to their named beneficiary. We hope that "named" beneficiary is consistent with the "intentions" of the member. TRS will only be able to honor the "named" beneficiary UNLESS the named beneficiary renounces the benefit. Similarly, a vested member who passes away may be leaving their named beneficiary a lump sum payment or even an option to draw a benefit for life.

Things can be a little different in the case of a retired TRS member. This is especially true for retirees who selected one of the plan B option choices. Most of our retirees (57%) select the maximum plan, Plan A, upon retirement. For most of these retirees, there will not be any residual value in a plan A retirement after approximately 24 months of drawing their retirement. We do, however, from time to time see a beneficiary pass away within a short time following retirement and the residual monetary value could well exceed \$100,000.

For retirees who select a Plan B option choice, they have

been elected to receive an amount less than the maximum amount, but when they pass away, they will be leaving some amount of money to one or more beneficiaries for the rest of their lives. That is truly a great opportunity to help out either a spouse, other family member, or even someone else who is listed as a beneficiary. Occasionally, we see a retiree outlive their beneficiary, and there may be options to name another beneficiary to replace their initial beneficiary. This does, however, almost always result in a lower benefit being received by the retiree.

My point in all of this information today is simply this: every TRS member, active or retired, should periodically check to ensure that their beneficiaries are up to date in our system. The easiest way is to check this information, and even update that information, is via our online member portal located at www.trsga.com. Further assistance can be obtained by contacting one of our outstanding customer service agents at 404-352-6500.

I know this edition's article has been a bit on the morbid side, but just know, we want our retirees and beneficiaries to be the happiest people we know! Having the right people listed as your beneficiaries is a part of that formula! We wish for each of you good health and happiness as you continue to enjoy your retirement! Thank you for the honor that I have to serve you and our active and retired educators in Georgia!

Ramblin' Around with the Executive Director

By Bill Sloan, Executive Director



William Sloan

Good day from the suburbs of Flowery Branch, Georgia. As I sit here in our beautiful office complex looking out over the Atlanta Falcons football complex and the Blue Ridge mountains in the distance, I am reminded once again that it is always a great day to be a retired educator in Georgia.

We are truly blessed to have one of the very best Teacher Retirement Systems in the nation and our State Health Benefits have never been in better shape! The leadership provided by Dr. Buster Evans at TRS and Louis Amis at SHBP is truly outstanding and we are blessed to have these two men leading these important organizations for retired educators.

I hope as many people as possible will attend our state convention this year. President Joe Boland and his convention committee led by Liz Bouis have been working diligently all year to make this a great event for everyone. By popular demand, the band from last year is coming back for another great night of our kind of music. If you missed them last year, you missed a real treat. You will not want to miss them this year. Back in Time is an outstanding band and several GREA members are part of it. There will be some surprise guests that you will not want to miss. Registration info can be found on our website at garetirededucators.org.

Our 2024-25 officers will be installed on Thursday

Approximately 53% of our active members do not have a named beneficiary in our system!

morning at the convention. Come and celebrate with incoming President Shirley Grant from Habersham County and President/Elect Geraldine Reid from Tri County REA. All GREA members look forward to working with these fine ladies.

I want to commend current GREA President, Joe Boland, for his outstanding work and his commitment to visiting local units. Joe and his wife Melinda have really been traveling all over Georgia. His effort to visit local units has been truly outstanding. Thank you, Joe and Melinda!

I want to thank all of you for your support of GREA this year. We have truly had an outstanding year in so many ways. I am so blessed to have been your Executive Director for the last almost 19 years.

GREA Bus Safety

Dr. Henrietta Gray, GREM President



Henrietta Gray

The best buses provide a safe environment for everyone. Confluent to the main thing, our able bus driver President Boland, are some humanistic auxiliary points of wisdom. To have a pleasant, enjoyable and safe ride avoid negative people, avoid those who gossip about your Leadership Team, local and

state.

Don't let anyone take your seat. Believe in yourself and set yourself to serve more in 2024. Use your God given gifts, skills, and abilities to serve well. Be Intentional in moving in alignment with our President's agenda and goals, fully supporting his Humanitarian Project. Let us all be instruments of unity and solidarity. Extend the same grace and forgiveness to others for which you want to be a recipient. Many among us profess to be a Christian; as such we are scripturally required to not just hold it as an idea in our heads or a sentiment in our hearts but work out its implications in every detail of our lives.

My final safety rule for the GREA BUS is that we guard our thoughts because they become our words, guard our words because they become our actions, guard our actions because they become our character and guard our character because it determines the level of God's blessings in our lives.

I am looking forward to riding the "Boland Bus" with many of you all the way to Athens. Our President is preparing a wonderful experience for all of us when we get off the bus in Athens. Be a committee of one and make sure the members from your local have a ticket.

I am still asking that you make a visit to our museum a priority. Our museum curator, Marcia Wendel, continues to do an excellent job. Our museum is beautiful, informative, and exciting. Our curator leads the way in keeping it relevant and engaging.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

A Word from the GRE Foundation

By Barbara T. Wilcher, Chair

The members of the Georgia Retired Educators Foundation, Inc. are working hard to secure funding for scholarships to be awarded to needy certified and classified school employees across the state of Georgia. This year, the GRE Foundation will be awarding \$1000 scholarships to ten applicants from several of the eighteen GREA areas. During the last week of January, Barbara T. Wilcher, Chair emailed the GRE Foundation application to all superintendents and principals on the GaDOE website. Any superintendent, principal, or applicant who did not receive the application can find it on the GREA website under Foundation or may email me, watusi50@att.net.

Our goal for 2025 is to award twenty (20) \$1,000 scholarships. For us to reach our goal, we need help from every individual and/or unit. We are asking each GREA unit to donate at least \$100.00 to the Foundation. Also, you or your unit may give a tax-deductible scholarship in the amount of \$1000 or a donation in memory of or in honor of someone. All donations will go to the to the foundation. **All checks should be made out to "GRE Foundation, Inc." and mailed to Dr. William Gardner, 11 Springer Way, Rocky Face, GA 30740.** Your contributions will be greatly appreciated.

The GRE Foundation will oversee the Silent Auction. All units are asked to bring items, (new or used) to be auctioned off. Please bring items to the silent auction room at the convention. The silent auctions items can only be purchased with cash or check. We cannot accept credit or debit cards.

If you are interested in serving on the GRE Foundation Board, please email your name, unit, and area number to watusi50@att.net.

Thank you for your continued support.

Wall of Honor Plaque

By Jesse Hunter

With winter behind us, the optimism of spring offers a preview of good things to come. The Wall of Honor affords our members (and non-members) the opportunity to purchase a plate (2.75" x 1") in honor or memory of someone. Each plate is \$50.00, and the information and the form are available on the GREA website. Join us as the legacy of the honorees are accentuated on the plaque.

Hope to see everyone in Athens for the convention!

Convention Breakout Sessions

By Liz Bouis, Convention Chair

The GREA Convention Planning Committee is proud to announce our schedule of Breakout Sessions for the 2024 Convention. Breakout Sessions will be 45 minutes each and will be held from 10:30 until 1:30, and you will be able to attend three sessions of your choosing. This year our sessions will include:

- **“Get BACK on the Bus: Celebrating with Kids Throughout the Year.”** At this interactive session, participants will develop units that they will be able to share with groups (schools, libraries, scouts, or churches) you might volunteer for or just enjoy with their own grandchildren!
- **“The Three C’s of Estate Planning.”** Come join a Certified Elder Law Attorney to learn all about the documents we all need to have to make sure our health care and our financial wishes are understood for our estates.
- **“The POWER of our Gmail and Google Drive.”** Listen as a current Media Specialist teaches about the tools we have on our phones to organize our lives in highly effective and sustainable way.
- **“iPhone Tips and Tricks and Photography.”** This same Media Specialist will help you unlock the hidden potential you carry in your purse or pocket!
- **“The Challenge of Survival for Children during the Holocaust.”** You history buffs will enjoy this session by an expert on Holocaust Education.
- **“Seniors in Motion.”** Back by popular demand! Come take a peek at some sample senior exercises to keep

you moving and strong!

- **“Georgia Made”** This nominee for Georgia author of the Year will lead a discussion about his book, *Georgia Made*, in which he chronicles the lives of several famous Georgia natives.
- **“Hooper-Renwick Library & Museum.”** Learn about the preservation of the Hooper-Renwick School, Gwinnett County’s only African American public school for decades.
- **“Penny Pinchers.”** Come find out all about easy ways you can save money. This session will also feature the Passport Program from AMBA.
- **“Day Lilies.”** A well-known day lily hybridizer will come and show you how to incorporate day lilies in your garden this summer.
- **“GREA Leadership Academy.”** New this year, veteran GREA members will discuss ways to enhance your leadership skills, including ways to run your meeting, as well as ideas for recruiting new folks to be a part of your leadership teams.
- **“A Roundtable Discussion of our Benefits.”** This session will feature representatives from TRS, AMBA, and State Health Benefits who will give you an overview of their news and give participants the opportunity to ask questions.

As a special bonus in the afternoon, The Exchange Club of Rome will be bringing a replica of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier to Athens. This is an exact scale replica of the Tomb located in Arlington National Cemetery. Members of the Club will give a history of the Tomb and the replica, and then attendees will have the opportunity to ask questions, take pictures, and examine the display.

News From GREA Local Units

Atlanta REA began the year with a “Meet and Greet” at the lovely home of incoming President Vernita Burford. In addition to enjoying a delicious lunch, members, new and old, had the opportunity to fellowship, play games, meet our officers, and informally discuss our goals for the year. Following the business section of our meeting in January, our special activity was to make Valentine cards and send them out to our seniors and members who are sick and shut in and unable to attend our meetings. In February, the executive board met at our President’s home to review and share our opinions on the activities we have completed thus far. We are excited about and look forward to our plans for the upcoming months.

Bibb County REA members celebrated our Christmas luncheon with the Miller Middle School Fine Arts chorus. We were blessed by the students’ beautiful voices singing Christmas carols. Our guest presenter was Superintendent Dr. Dan A. Sims. He always enlightens us by sharing his plans that are benefiting students and the staff in Bibb County Public Schools. We were excited to begin 2024 with inviting Greek organizations to our first meeting. Each organization were asked to wear their colors. Delta Sigma Theta had the most in attendance and they received an award. A certificate was given to each chapter’s president. Non-Greek Letters and the Eastern Starts were in attendance. In addition, AKA District Attorney Anita Howard was our guest speaker. She spoke to the members about senior safety and Restoring Inspiration by Success in Education (R.I.S.E.).

Brantley County REA has been actively serving our community, as we collected student supplies (e.g., crayons, pencils, paper, notebooks - over

650 items total) in December and donated them to our school system to distribute as needed for the new semester in January. During “pre-planning” for the new semester, we also presented a bag of popcorn and a bottled water to every employee of the BC School System, with a note conveying our appreciation for them. We were pleased to have GA State Representative John Corbett present in our January meeting to discuss current and expected future legislation, esp. that which will affect education and retirees. Joining Mr. Corbett during the discussion was our BC School Superintendent Dr. Kim Morgan, as well as some BOE members and school administrators. In our February meeting we collected various large print media (137 items - e.g., novels, puzzle/activity books), and those were distributed to the BC Senior Center and our local nursing home / rehab facility. Our presenters for this meeting were representatives from those organizations, who were very informative regarding the populations they serve and the services they provide.

Bulloch REA commenced the initial meeting of the year with an exciting CHEER led by Pamela Bland, President-Elect. Plans were made for the six meetings of the year and chairpersons were identified with the support of Beth Persinger, former President, and other members present. Glennara Martin, President, was pleased with the enthusiasm demonstrated by members. BREA was honored to host the meeting for Areas 5 & 6 on Tuesday, August 15, 2023. The meeting was held at Pittman Park United Methodist Church in Statesboro with Dr. Connie S. Cooper, Area 6 Director, presiding. Charles Wilson, Bulloch County School Superintendent,

welcomed the group. A few of the presenters at the meeting included Edna Shurley, Area 5 Director, Joe Boland, GREA President, Bill Sloan, GREA Executive Director, and other staff members. The information presented was very informative. BREA is continuing efforts to increase future educators of Georgia by accepting donations from members and our partner, the local Core Credit Union, to provide scholarships to local high school graduates who plan to major in Education. At our January 2024 meeting, Core Credit Union increased their contribution for scholarships from \$3,000 to \$4,000. Priscilla Clifton presents an update on membership at each meeting. The committee meets regularly at the home of Sarah Hines to contact all prospective members. Dr. Gwendolyn Yarbrough meets regularly with the BRESFI (Bulloch Retired Educators Scholarship Foundation, Inc.) foundation and reports at each meeting. Dr. Carolyn Smith informs the group of the deceased and the ill on a regular basis. Dr. Vera Richmond provides Door Prizes for meetings. Glennara Martin, President, is delighted with the support and dedication of BREA members.

BURKE COUNTY REA is doing well and continues to “Stay on the Bus.” The guest speaker for November was Rev. Loretta Strong, CEO of W.A.T.C.H., (Women and Their Children’s Haven).” The goal of the program is to strengthen academic performance. We adopted and donated to this well needed program. Our Annual Christmas Luncheon at Country Boys Restaurant on Dec. 7th. We enjoyed games, readings, delicious food, and most of all the fellowship. We contributed to CSRA EOA Adopt-A-Child and donated \$200 to the Presidential Humanitarian Project – Totes for Tots. President Emanuel Larkin, Jr. participated in Midville & Waynesboro’s Christmas Parades. The New Year began with Speaker Kimberly Mathis, Director of Burke County Senior Citizen Center. Their mission is, “Leveraging Resources Empowering People and Advocating to Alleviate Poverty in the CSRA.” The session was very informative. Our unit was represented in the parade for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. Our American Heart Luncheon was held on Feb. 1st in Augusta, Georgia at The Chop House.. Members donated \$725 at the luncheon for such a worthy cause, the American Heart Association.

Camden REA has been all about service. Members participated in a book & pajama Christmas gift distribution to children at the local head start; supported the elderly at the senior center; provided food to local church food banks; presented a generous donation check to a domestic abuse shelter; entered a decorated vehicle in the Martin Luther King Unity March and are currently volunteering at a Volunteer Income Tax Assistance site that provides free Income Tax Assistance. Members celebrated the life and mourned the passing of two long time members, one a founding member for which the annual scholarship is named. It will now be called the Solomon Sparks Memorial Scholarship, given each year to a graduating senior majoring in Education. Members enjoyed a great holiday fellowship with games, gifts, trivia, and food. In the coming months they will host the new Camden County Superintendent, a GREA officer, celebrate Black History Month, Valentine’s and St. Patrick’s Day and continue their dedication to community service and great fellowship.

Chatham REA kicked off 2024 with the annual tour of local schools. Members toured White Bluff Elementary School. Mrs. Beth Malone, Academic Coach conducted the tour. We observed students hard at work and were able to join a music class learning music patterns using their hands and feet as musical instruments. It was fun to be back in the classroom. Chatham REA members continue to support the community through donations to local agencies such as Greenbriar Childrens’ Center, the Ronald McDonald House, Park Place, and local schools. They are volunteering in voter education programs and activities and plan to serve as school testing proctors. Chatham REA will award scholarships to students attending Georgia Southern University, and Savannah State University later this year. We are also looking forward to attending the GREA Convention in May 2024.

Cobb/Marietta REA has had a very busy and exciting year. We began our meetings in August at a new location, The Ben Robertson Community Center in Kennesaw, Georgia. This facility provided easier access from the parking lot for members with mobility issues and resulted in more members attending our meetings. We have had very informative programs that included, Joe Boland (GREA State President), Home Fire Safety (Tom Robison, Senior Fire Fighter Dekalb County Fire Department), Frank Hutchison (Area 15 Director) and AMBA representative (LeeAnn Sturtz), Aloha to Aging (Dawn Reed), and Neely Young (Georgia Author). In addition to our outstanding programs, we have been busy collecting donations for Totes to Tots (\$1,175 – so far!), Hollydale Methodist Church Backpack Ministry (\$650.00), Cobb County Homeless Student Program (\$ 285.00 in cash and 420.00 in gift cards), and the Ron Croker Transformation Center (\$470.00). We also awarded five scholarships of \$2,000 each to recipients who are either completing a degree in education or adding a degree as they teach.

Dalton Whitfield Murray REA held their annual December luncheon/auction to benefit the scholarship fund. The event was held at the Dalton Golf and Country Club. Over 100 members and guests enjoyed a silent auction, a buffet lunch, and a live auction. Scott Chitwood, Whitfield County Sheriff, served as auctioneer, and president, Gary Cochran was the host for the event. Over \$16,400 was raised for the scholarship fund. Auction co-chairs, Dorothy Gray and Twinkle Chitwood, along with the auction committee, appreciate all the support from the community and members for the event. Plans are already underway for the auction/luncheon in December 2024.

Dawson County REA has been busy this year. We have loved on our middle and high school teachers with a monthly treat of snacks, home baked goods and gift card drawings. In December, we provided sweet treats and bingo prizes for our senior citizens. We are helping our elementary schools with volunteers for book fairs, and we are looking forward in April to provide our first “Welcome to Retirement” reception. DCREA is committed to service and support!

Dougherty County REA celebrated Retired Educators Day, November 5th by holding the monthly meeting on Thursday, November 2nd in the Media Center at Turner Elementary School of the Dougherty County School System. When asked what he wanted the Association to do for the school and teachers, he stated, “our students need uniforms and that would be a great way to make an impact.” The DCREA donated uniforms, underwear, and socks to the students at Turner Elementary School. The door prizes brought for the November meeting were left for the teachers at the school. Albany Mayor Bo Dorough was on hand at this meeting to sign the Proclamation for setting aside Retired Educators Day, November 5, 2024 for Dougherty County. Principal Grace welcomed the group and provided and served a tasty lunch. The Association also rang the bell for the Salvation Army during the Holidays.

Effingham REA began the new year with a meeting on January 8, 2024, with about 35 in attendance. A report of our December bake sale was given, and we can use the proceeds toward our Scholarship Fund and our School Project. We have chosen our School Project to be an Appreciation Breakfast for our county’s school bus drivers and maintenance workers. We will have two breakfast events, honoring the drivers and workers in both directions of the county. These will be held on March 4 and March 5 prior to their monthly safety meetings. We are extremely appreciative of their efforts in transporting our students in a safe way, and we wish to honor them for their continued service. Our speaker for this meeting was Trey Strickland, a funeral director from Strickland and Sons Funeral Home. He was very informative, giving our group some tips on funeral planning and decision-making for later in our lives. Pam Anderegg announced a nominating committee for the purpose of recommending nominees for the election of officers to be held in May 2024. A nice lunch was enjoyed by all, and we look forward to meeting again in March.

Emanuel REA has had a busy year. Some of our chapter members have been working with Read United by spending many hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays helping a select group of third grade students increase their language skills. Emanuel REA has collected items for the local animal shelter as well as making monthly donations to the Sunshine House. We have heard very informative speakers from not only Read United but also from the Choice Program at East Georgia State College. Senator Max Burns and Representative Butch Parrish have kept us updated on legislation pending in our state, especially as it affects education matters. A group of middle school students spoke on various subjects at one meeting. We have a great program planned for April when the Swainsboro Police Chief will demonstrate the use of drones.

Fayette County REA finished 2023 by completing our Community Service Project, "Reading is Super Power." Members sorted donated books by grade level and placed five books into a nylon drawstring backpack. FCREA distributed two hundred backpacks to five local charities in December, and these charities delivered the backpacks directly to the students they serve. This year's Georgia Future Educators Signing Day will be held statewide on Tuesday, May 7, 2024, during Teacher Appreciation Week. This will be year two for Fayette County REA to partner with the Fayette County School System (FCSS) and the Georgia Department of Education to promote education as a profession. Doe Evans, FCREA President shared, "it is our privilege to join in the celebration of FCSS' future educators so that FCSS can grow their own to fill the needs of Fayette's schools." We are excited we reached our Scholarship Fundraising goal of \$2500 in January, which was achieved by member donations. Our Scholarship committee will select and award a \$1500 college scholarship to a Fayette County School Senior pursuing a degree in Education at our Annual Scholarship Luncheon on May 9th.

Floyd-Rome REA had a great February meeting. Co-president Nancy Ivester arranged for a school bus driver to speak and tell us what "a day in the life of a bus driver is like." One of the bus driver's supervisors came and talked about what the bus drivers have are required to do to get a license. We also packed gift bags for over 208 bus drivers. Nancy delivered these to the county office where the drivers could receive them after finishing their day. We were entertained by the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten classes of Darlington School who sang all the verses of "The Wheels of the Bus go Round and Round." Attendance of our meetings is improving as we had 62 present.

Griffin-Spalding REA discussed internet safety at a recent meeting. Andrea Griffin, Marketing and "First Friends" Director for First National Bank-Griffin and Chris Benise, First National Bank's Bank Secrecy Act (BSA)/Compliance Officer, made the presentation. Topics of discussion included spoofing, phishing, use of strong passwords and Internet scams. Each member received The Georgia Consumer Protection Guide for Older Adults, courtesy of First National Bank. In January, members enjoyed a program presented by retired speech and language therapist/minister and second-generation storyteller Juanitress Morris Cofield. Her stories were both humorous and meaningful. We are on the bus!

Gwinnett County REA held the first meeting of the year on January 12th at TPC Sugarloaf Country Club in Duluth. The program for that meeting focused on our health and fitness. Melissa Anthony of Silver Sneakers spoke to the group about Silver Sneakers fitness classes which can be taken in person or online. She spoke about the importance of moving for seniors. Her associate then led the group in a fitness routine which could be done standing or seated. Members were also encouraged to set some practical health goals for themselves and to record them on a 4 X 6 card to be shared at the next meeting.

Jefferson County REA this year had one of its most informative programs presented by Georgia certified pharmacist Dr. Nan Gunn. Dr. Gunn took a

deep dive into three pertinent pharmaceutical areas for the very attentive retirees at our October meeting: 1) prescription drugs, over-the-counter medications, and supplements; 2) drug interactions; and 3) immunizations. Salient points she emphasized that we should know about our medications included the following: the name of each medication taken (keep a list), prescription use or purpose, directions for use (including best time of day to take), storage requirements, and side effects. A "for example" about being sure to find out how to take medications was a warning not to crush a medication that is designed for timed release. The presentation concluded with a very lively question and answer session. From our kick-off in August hosting the area meeting for Areas 11 & 12 to the celebration of Retired Educators Day (with Rep. Brian Prince again as our speaker) to sponsoring the "Apple for the Teachers & Staff Event at all five schools (celebrating American Education Week) to continuation of our Adopt-a-Pre-K classroom at the three elementary schools, JCREA has been "on the bus" to "fellowship, service and support." In addition, we continue to support our local food pantry, have contributed to GREA President Boland's humanitarian project, and look forward to successfully completing our remaining goals for the 2023-2024 year.

Lincoln-Wilkes REA members recently toured Hillcrest Farms, Inc., an 850-acre dairy farm, located in Dearing, GA. Hillcrest Farms, Georgia's first Robotic Dairy, was started in 1941 by the Rodgers family. It is now on its 4th generation, three of which still work on the Farm. Mark Rodgers, an owner affectionately called 'Farmer Mark' by the many children who tour the dairy, was LWREA's tour guide. The information provided by Farmer Mark was interesting and informative. There are approximately 750 Holstein cows and calves at the Dairy of which 310 cows are milked daily. The average weight of each adult cow is 1300 pounds. The members toured the Robotic Observation Center, rode the farm trolley, and observed sustainable farming practices in action. The attention, care, and comfort provided to the cows were evident. The Q&A session that followed was extremely educational. The tour culminated with LWREA member, Welcome E. Mason, being selected the winner for choosing the name, "Welcome," for a newborn calf.

Mitchell-Baker REA celebrated Thanksgiving lunch Thursday, November 9, 2023, at the elementary school in Mitchell County, Baconton, GA. School administrators and the Baconton senior citizen Bible study group attended this festive event. The association also enjoyed Christmas lunch with the Baker County School System in Newton, GA. A memorial service was held in remembrance of deceased members. Our oldest member, Mrs. Glenelle Marcus (98), presented a lovely inspiration to the group. On Christmas Eve, the association put smiles on the faces of a family by providing shoes, clothing, and toys. We also donated \$300.00 to Totes to Tots. During the holiday season, everyone had a joyous time and was blessed with good health and time well spent with family and friends.

Muscogee REA hosted Dr. David Lewis, Muscogee County School District Superintendent, at their meeting December 8, 2023, who welcomed members and encouraged them to continue to vote for the ESplost tax so that school safety can be improved. He also encouraged members to vote "no" for the Voucher Bill because it supports parents taking their children to private schools rather than public schools. Dr. Jeanette Marshall and Dr. Mary Avery arranged a beautiful holiday program for the December 8th meeting. The MREA Christmas Band led by Douglas Albritten started off the program and got everyone in the holiday spirit with some rousing Christmas carols. The Northside High School Chorus then sang a selection of beautiful holiday songs under the direction of Kasey Ward, Director. The MREA members were delighted to watch as the Jazz Dancers from the Rainey-McCullers School of the Arts performed a wonderfully choreographed jazz number. Their director is Madalyn Tweed. The last performer on the program was Mr. Wentzel Stewart, a Performance Artist

specializing in inspirational listening music. He played several musical selections while lunch was served and enjoyed. Later in program he played and sang one of his original songs "You Came for Us" which was a special treat!

Paulding REA had a star-studded meeting in January. We were treated to a choral performance by our "adopted" school of the year, South Paulding Middle School. We were also blessed to have the best featured speakers we could hope for: GREA President Joe Boland, TRS Communications Manager Mike Zarem, and AMBA Advisor LeeAnn Sturtz all lent their words of wisdom. We continue to pay our blessings forward by collecting and distributing food and household items to Paulding Helping Hands, collections for Totes to Tots, and spoiling our students at SPMS with hygiene items and gift cards. All aboard for the convention in May!

Richmond County REA held their February meeting on Wednesday, February 6th. We had the Mr. Joe Boland as our guest speaker. He had us all wanting to get on bus with his words of knowledge and his humor. We also had Mr. Michael Zarem from TRS who provided the members with a lot of valuable information. The meeting had a Valentine theme and members and guests won Valentine Gnomes as door prizes. A GREA-t time was had by all who attended.

Peach County REA enjoyed spreading Christmas Joy in December. The members were presented goodie bags from the president and past presidents of the organization. The members then traveled to Virginia Gardens Personal Care Home in Fort Valley and Oaks Nursing Home in Marshallville, GA to sing Christmas carols to the residents. Christmas goodie bags were presented to the residents of the Fort Valley Healthcare Center. During the December meeting the members were given safety tips for every day and especially during the holidays. The members started off the new year concentrating on good health and wellness with Silver Sneaker instructor Karen Self. She showed the members several chair exercises that can be done by anyone at any age. The members "got on the bus" and traveled to Montgomery, Alabama to visit the Freedom Rides Museum. February meeting celebrated Black History Month with the singing of Spirituals and a message from Robertiena Fletcher, a survivor of the Leesburg Stockade. This is documented history of thirty-three African American teen-aged girls, between the ages of 12 - 15, that were taken by Americus police department and placed inside of a makeshift holding pen in Leesburg, Georgia during the Civil Rights Movement.

Rockdale REA has had a very successful last several months. In November at their scheduled meeting, the Rockdale Board of Commissioners issued a proclamation recognizing Rockdale's retired educators. At our December meeting we conducted our annual Silent Auction to raise money for our Scholarship Fund. This was our 8th year to conduct an auction and it was our most successful so far. We were able to add \$2,567.00 to our Scholarship Fund through auction sales and monetary donations. Our Scholarship Committee in the next several months will be finalizing this year's recipients. The scholarships will be presented at our June meeting. Two of the items sold in our Silent Auction were donated paintings. They were purchased by one of our members and donated to two local organizations. One was donated to the New Depot Players (our local theater group) and will be hung in their theater. The other painting was donated to the Rockdale Library and will be hung in the library. Two members of RREA are on the Rockdale County ESPLOST advisory committee. At our January meeting they talked about the various proposed projects to be voted on in the next local election. We are in the final stages of completing our services projects. In August we presented "Welcome to Rockdale Goodie Bags" to teachers new to Rockdale County. In January we made our annual donation of school supplies that we have collected. We annually make our school supply donation halfway through the school year. We will complete our third service project in March. At our monthly meetings we collect

food items and monetary donations for Rockdale Emergency Relief. For members who might forget their food items, or prefer to make a monetary donation, we have a large "Pink Pig" to collect those donations. Our goal for food items for the year is 500 and for monetary donations \$200.00. As of our January meeting we are close to completing both of those goals. We continue with our "Meeting Attire" for our meetings. January was Sweater Day. February's recommended attire should feature something associated with Valentine's Day and March will feature St. Patrick's Day. We have also continued our monthly end of meetings Game Time. January's game was called: To Be, Or Not to Be. Can You Answer the Question? How much Shakespeare could table groups remember. We have had some very entertaining games to end our meetings so far.

Sumter County REA chose as their 2023-2024 School Project to present copy paper to the Sumter County Primary School teachers. In January President Sue Hite along with members from SCREA presented Dr. Renee Mays, Principal of SCPS, with nine cases of copy paper, enough for each teacher to receive a pack of paper. Pictured with Dr. Mays and Hite are members Brenda Jennings, Donna Franklin, Cindy Schaffner, and Carol Hargrove. Not pictured Cheryl Fletcher and Jane Butler.

Tri-County REA held their fourth meeting of the 2023-2024 year on February 1st at Thomson-McDuffie County Library in Thomson, Georgia. Members were excited to have Lisa McKenzie, Benefits Representative with Association Members Benefits Advisor (AMBA) as the guest speaker. AMBA partners with the Georgia Retired Educators Association. Lisa McKenzie discussed State Health Benefit changes, changes with Medicare and the Benefits of AMBA's My Passport program. After her presentation, Lisa McKenzie was presented with a Certificate of Appreciation for her support from Tri-County REA. The turnout was great!

Troup REA in LaGrange collected small toiletries or travel size items as their service project. These items will be bagged and taken to the Women's Center. We are going to continue this project into February and donate to one of the other agencies that are aiding the homeless.

Valdosta Lowndes REA in December Captain Judy Chung & Captain Hoon Chung were our guest speakers from our local Salvation Army of Valdosta unit. Captain Judy Chung shared that an emphasis has been placed on community youth, meals for shelter residents and church each Sunday with meals (70-80 served each week). Each VLREA member donated toys to the Salvation Army of Valdosta Empty Stocking Fund, helping children receive a Merry Christmas. Each member brought an unwrapped gift or two for children to our December meeting. "We are so grateful for the donations, Captain J. Chung said, "We could not provide children with a special Christmas without the support of our donors and community partners." The monthly meeting concluded with Christmas carols, fellowship, and lunch. In January, our speaker, Mrs. Christi Marsh, a State Farm Insurance Agent, who offers Retirement Investment Services to retirees and she shared information about Financial Literacy--Budgeting, Saving & Investing Money and knowing where the money goes. She said the biggest issues most often is "living within our means" and "working on removing debt." The members were "Getting on the Bus" by collecting non-perishable canned good items for our community service project for the months of January and February. These items will be delivered to our Second Harvest of South Georgia/Valdosta food bank. We celebrated an early Valentine's Day with trivia games and handing out Valentine's Day goody bags to all who attended. Valdosta REA will continue to work on increasing their membership and to be actively involved in their community.

A Word from AMBA

Who Gets the Call? Are Your Emergency Contacts Up to Date?

Nobody wants to think about a medical emergency happening to them. But everyone needs to recognize the importance of being prepared.

No matter your age or how healthy you are, emergency contacts are one of the most important ways to be ready in case of a medical emergency. After all, unforeseen events like car accidents, severe weather events, or natural disasters can happen to anyone, anytime. An emergency contact is more than a formality when filling out enrollment forms or completing paperwork at a doctor's office. Immediate health issues might necessitate quick communication with family or specific healthcare professionals in times of need.

How to Choose Your Emergency Contact:

Having reliable emergency contacts can act as a safety net. Your emergency contact list should be people who:

- Are close to you, you trust, and know your needs and wants.
- Can talk knowledgeably to medical professionals about your medical history, current medications allergies, and chronic conditions.
- Can make critical, life-saving medical decisions.
- Is willing and mentally fit to take on the responsibility.
- Also has the legal right to act on your behalf.
- Can provide emotional support and comfort in times of distress.

How to Ensure a Reliable Emergency Contact

- Regularly Update Information: Contacts might change over time. Whether it is a change in phone number or someone else becoming the primary point of contact, be sure to keep the information up to date.
- Multiple Contacts: Having more than one emergency contact is always a good idea. This increases the chances of reaching someone quickly during urgent situations.
- Clarify Roles: Clearly outline what each emergency contact is responsible for. For instance, one might be the primary contact for medical decisions, while another could be for logistical or day-to-day concerns.

The importance of emergency contacts cannot be overstated. These contacts serve as a bridge, ensuring you are always connected to loved ones and receive the care and support you need, no matter the situation. By maintaining updated and reliable emergency contacts, you can ensure the well-being and peace of mind. Likewise, **being prepared for the cost of emergency medical transportation also can't be overstated. A ground ambulance or air transport could cost thousands of dollars. Medicare may not cover this. Medical Air Services Association (MASA) provides the MASA Emergency Shield Plan for lifesaving emergency transportation services. Services are paid in full, with no deductibles, co-pays, or dollar limits. Whether you're home or traveling, MASA Emergency Shield covers your ambulance or airlift, regardless of your age or medical condition. Plus, you can get your plan through a trusted source: your very own association and AMBA. Get your plan now at www.AMBamedtransport.com or call 855-961-5267.**



New Area Directors



Area 2
Jane Butler,
Sumter



Area 6
Gwendolyn Yarbrough,
Bulloch



Area 16
Becky Oliver,
Gilmer



Area 18
Juanita Tipton,
Lumpkin



President-Elect
Geraldine Reid,
Tri-County

GET ON THE BUS!
2023-2024

Fellowship • Service • Support

The graphic features a blue background with the text "GET ON THE BUS!" in large white letters at the top. Below it, "2023-2024" is written in a smaller white font. In the center is a hand-drawn illustration of a yellow bus with "GREAA" written on its side and a red octagonal "STOP" sign on the front. At the bottom, the words "Fellowship • Service • Support" are written in white.

Across the State





**GEORGIA RETIRED EDUCATORS CONVENTION
TENTATIVE SCHEDULE
MAY 7 - 9, 2024
CLASSIC CENTER, ATHENS, GEORGIA**

TUESDAY, MAY 7, 2024			
10:00 AM	5:00 PM	Convention Registration	Main Floor Lobby
10:00 AM	5:00 PM	Information/Welcome Table	Registration Area
10:00 AM	5:00 PM	Exhibitors/Vendors	Main Floor Lobby
10:00 AM	5:00 AM	Display Room Set-up	Athena F
10:00 AM	3:00 AM	Silent Auction Set-up	Athena B/C
12:00 PM	5:00 PM	Hospitality/Social/Game Room	Athena F
1:00 PM	2:00 PM	GREA Foundation Board Meeting	Athena D
3:00 PM	5:00 PM	General Session I	Athena E
5:30 PM	9:00 PM	Social Hour with Cash Bar	Pre-Function Area
6:30 PM	9:00 PM	Welcome Banquet	Grand Hall 1-5

WEDNESDAY, MAY 8, 2024			
8:30 AM	10:15 AM	Local Unit Award Breakfasts	Various
8:30 AM	11:00 AM	Convention Registration	Main Floor Lobby
9:00 AM	5:00 PM	Exhibitors/Vendors	Registration Area
9:00 AM	5:00 PM	Information/Welcome Table	Registration Area
10:00 AM	3:00 PM	Silent Auction	Athena B/C
10:00 AM	4:00 PM	Hospitality/Social/Game Room	Athena F
10:00 AM	4:00 AM	Display Room	Athena F
10:45 AM	11:30 AM	Breakout Sessions I	Various
11:45 AM	12:30 PM	Breakout Sessions II	Various
12:45 PM	1:30 PM	Breakout Sessions III	Various
2:00 PM	3:30 PM	Additional Sessions I	Various
4:30 PM	5:30 PM	Memorial Service	Athena E
5:30 PM	9:00 PM	Social Hour with Cash Bar	Pre-Function Area outside Grand Hall
6:30 PM	9:00 PM	Banquet	Grand Hall 1-5

THURSDAY, MAY 9, 2024			
9:00 AM	11:30 AM	General Session II	Athena E
12:00 PM	2:00 PM	Governing Board Luncheon & Meeting	Olympia 1



REGISTRATION FORM
GREA 64th Annual Convention
The Classic Center, Athens, Georgia
May 7th - 9th, 2024



Each individual registering must do a separate form!

Name (as you want it to appear on your badge): _____

Local Unit Name: _____ Area: _____

Office Held (if any): _____

Address: _____

City, State: _____ Phone: _____

Registration for Convention* \$55 Amt \$ _____

*Early Bird Registration Before April 1st \$50

Tuesday Banquet (May 7th at 6:30 pm)** \$50 Amt \$ _____

Wednesday Awards Breakfast (May 8th at 8:30 am) \$45 Amt \$ _____

Wednesday Banquet (May 8th at 6:30 pm)** \$50 Amt \$ _____

** _____ I would like to order a vegetarian meal.

** _____ I would like to order a vegan meal.

** _____ I would like to order a gluten-free meal.

Your check, made out to GREA, should be for the total amount shown above. Please do not include any types of payments or donations in your registration check. No refunds, or changes to meal choices, can be made after April 14th.

Reminder: Meal Tickets must be bought BEFORE the convention, and they will not be sold at the convention. Everyone taking part in any convention activities including meals must register for convention.

Mail to: GREA Convention Registration
P.O. Box 1379
Flowery Branch, GA 30542

Deadline to register for Convention: April 14, 2024

Room Reservation Information will be sent as soon as it becomes available.



GREA Loses a Great Leader

Area 2 Director Keith Lee, age 75, of Americus, passed away January 16, 2024, at Magnolia Manor. Keith Lee, known as Coach Lee by many, was a career educator. He was born and raised in Vienna, GA and attended Vienna High School, starring in basketball, football, and track & field. He attended Georgia Southwestern State University and obtained bachelor's, master's, and specialist degrees. He spent 34 years as a teacher, coach, and administrator. Starting as a history teacher and coach in Mystic, GA, and eventually at Staley Middle School and Lee Co Middle School, he retired as the Principal of Staley Middle School, which earned the National School of Excellence in 1990 while he was there. Coach Lee coached football and track & field at Staley Middle School and Americus High School. He was a part of the coaching staff of the 1975 AHS State and National Championship football team. In the summers, Coach Lee oversaw the Sumter County Recreation Department swimming program. He also taught as an adjunct professor in the School of Education at Georgia Southwestern State University in Americus. After retirement, he spent 13 years in Schley County working in their Career & Technical Education Program. He also was an officer, including President, of the Sumter Retired Educators Association and Area Director of Georgia Retired Educators Association. Survivors include his wife Donna, three sons and daughters-in-law, eight grandchildren and a great grandson.

GREA

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Would you like to get your *GREA Bulletin* by email? Approximately 12,000 of our members are now getting their *GREA Bulletin* by email each quarter. The people who get it by email receive it approximately 2-3 weeks before the print edition is mailed to our members. In addition, the email copy is totally in color where the print edition is only partially in color due to the high cost of printing in color.

Postal rates are rising, so if you do not wish to receive the *Bulletin* or would like to receive it via email, please let us know by emailing us at gre3@grea3.org and we will be happy to put you on the email list. Thank you for considering getting your *Bulletin* by email.

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GREA BULLETIN

Georgia Retired Educators Association
The Only Organization That Concentrates Exclusively On The Welfare of Retired Educators of Georgia

Johnny Smith, Editor

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