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GET READY, SET, ADVOCATE! □ **BY TIM LEE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

The 2022 General Election is over, and many of us are relaxing and enjoying the holiday season and taking a much-needed break. But the 88th Texas Legislative Session will be here before you know it. On January 10, 2023, it's time to GO!

Inflation is taking a huge toll on TRS retirees, who have not received an actual COLA since 2004. In that time, inflation has increased by 57%, making a dollar today worth 65 cents compared to a 2004 dollar. TRS retirees are facing extremely difficult financial realities.

Members of the Texas Retired Teachers Association (TRTA) know that only the Texas Legislature can authorize an increase in pension benefits for retirees. We believe the Legislature wants to help! Our role is to educate them on our day-to-day realities and push the Legislature to help retirees as much as possible. Educating and pushing—no other group does that better than our members, our dedicated Texas retired school employees!

The path to success begins with each and every one of you. TRTA members need to be persistent, unwavering, and sharing the same message!

Although TRTA is a respected stakeholder that will have a seat at the table when there are discussions relating to TRS matters, it is YOUR membership in TRTA earns us that VOICE, a collective and respected force. The more members, the louder and stronger the VOICE!



This is the most important truth I have ever written in a TRTA bulletin:

Being an organized, focused, and influential advocacy group is harder today than it has ever been. We are all bombarded with tasks, responsibilities, or activities that demand our attention. We have less

time, more responsibility, and fewer resources. In addition, many people still feel as though the Legislature could have—and should have—acted last session to pass a raise for retirees.

These factors, along with the fact that there are other sources to vent frustrations about the legislative process (i.e. social media), has many people believing their involvement in an association like TRTA may not have the same value it once did.

My friends, it is for these same reasons that I tell you it is FAR MORE IMPORTANT to be involved in TRTA today than it ever has been. Everyone is confronted with the same distractions, the same noisemakers, time commitments, and frustrations—including elected officials.

In the legislative process, we have just 140 days to rise up, make our case, and persevere on winning our issue.

True advocacy must be organized, focused, share a strong and consistent message, be staffed by experts, perfectly planned, and powered by people who all work toward a common goal.

TRTA is the beacon, the resounding clarion call that unites our members in all aspects of advocacy. If we want to win, we MUST be organized.

In the legislative process, we are competing against every other advocacy interest in the state. Thousands of bills, innumerable interest groups, and millions of dollars



are all being smashed together during a 140-day legislative session to see what issues ultimately prevail.

Can any TRS retiree in need of a COLA truly afford to sacrifice their voice by standing alone in social media? TRTA adds power and strength to those messages. Together, we AMPLIFY your power, and we need you now!

If you want to help us win this legislative session, get one more person to join our membership and add their voice and power to this organization. Before you read that as a mere pitch for more members, please consider these facts.

TRTA efforts are aimed at helping approximately 458,000 TRS retirees, as well as protecting the retirement security of 1.3 million TRS active and retired members. TRTA is the largest and most recognized force in Texas and in the country that works exclusively on TRS retirement security issues. We do all this with less than 23 percent of TRS retirees as members of TRTA.

More than 77 percent of the TRS retiree population is sitting on the sidelines. Now is not the time to sit it out and hope that someone else will give us what we want. The reality of what we are dealing with means EVERYBODY HAS TO STEP UP. Not one day should pass during this legislative session that public education retirees are not on the lips of Texas legislators.

No one can promise or predict the outcome of any legislative session. But after more than 25 years in the



association and advocacy world, I know for a fact that sitting and waiting for help to come to us of its own accord will not happen. We MUST work for it. ALL of us.

Our power is our voice. Our voice is our membership. Our membership is every person who chooses to join our cause. Please, we need you now!

Your job now as a member is this: Reach out to your elected officials and TELL YOUR STORY!

Your voices must be heard, your struggles must be articulated. You are the backbone of TRTA's grassroots advocacy.

While you are reaching out to your legislators from home or visiting their district offices, your TRTA Capitol Team will be in Austin every day, walking the halls of the granite dome, meeting with elected officials, writing bill language, and attending committee hearings.

No matter how the Legislature chooses its priorities in 2023, TRTA is ready to advocate for yours by working with all Texas Senators and Representatives! With all of our members and our Capitol Team working together on the same cohesive goal, we can succeed this session.

Valuable Tools for Our Members

- TRTA Day at the Capitol! April 11-12, 2023: Be visible, be loud, bring a friend! This is our biggest TRTA event of the year!
- The Texas Legislature website (www.capitol.texas.gov) is the best resource for locating contact information for your Senators and Representatives, both at the Capitol and at their district offices.
- TRTA has put together its 2023 COLA Talking Points (see page 4) to help you as you communicate with your State Senators and Representatives this coming session.
- There are many great facts and figures available in the newly created TRS Great Value for All Texans brochure. This is a great resource to share with your legislators. You may download a complete copy here: www.trta.org/value-brochure.
- It is also more important than ever for our members to sign up for the *Inside Line*e-newsletter (www.trta.org/the-inside-line) and to download the TRTA App to get
 up-to-the-minute legislative alerts! Search for TRTA in your App Store on your
 mobile device.

Please use the resources made available to you in this issue, and via the *Inside Line* and the TRTA App, to guide your communications and actions this session. We will provide additional tools for you in the first quarter issue of *The VOICE* that comes out early next year, so keep an eye on your mailboxes in 2023!

TRTA is pleased to share photos of its members attending several district conferences this fall, from Districts 4, 10, and 19. Hundreds of members representing a variety of local chapters attended the conferences to discuss legislative advocacy goals and plans and share fellowship, among other important tasks. TRTA hired professional photographers to capture our lively and motivated members in action to demonstrate the true spirit of what it means to be a part of this great organization.

TRS RETIREES NEED A RAISE!

TRTA supports a substantial and meaningful costof-living adjustment (COLA) for TRS retirees as a priority item in the 88th Texas Legislature.



Inflation is a Pay Cut for TRS Retirees:

- Inflation is the highest it has been in 40 years.
- TRS retirees can't afford to pay their bills and are making difficult choices about food and medicine.
- All TRS retirees are hit by inflation; longer-term retirees are hit hardest.
- Cumulative inflation since 2004 is now at 57%. What cost \$1.00 in 2004 now costs \$1.57.
- Most TRS retirees do not receive Social Security and depend solely on their TRS retirement.
- Meanwhile, SS recipients received a 5.9% raise this year and will receive an increase of 8.7% in 2023.

ONLY the Texas Legislature Can Authorize a COLA for TRS Retirees:

- Funding is available to act on a COLA for retirees. The state must determine how it chooses to use its resources.
- The Texas Comptroller reports the state has a \$27 billion surplus next session.
- TRS retirees have helped add to the surplus through inflation-driven tax revenues that they cannot afford!
- Retired educators deserve to be at the top of the state's list of priorities when choosing how to spend the additional revenue.
- Since 2005, TRTA and the Texas Legislature have partnered together to increase funding to TRS, eliminate costly retirement loopholes, help make TRS actuarially sound, and provide three supplemental checks to TRS retirees. These steps were taken to benefit TRS and TRS retirees.
- The Legislature's actions have brought us forward to a time where a substantial COLA is now possible. We need the Legislature to act now!

The Time to Act is NOW!

- Retirees have been told to wait for a COLA until the timing is right. NOW is the time for a meaningful and substantial COLA for TRS retirees.
- The state has a huge budget surplus.
- Inflationary pressure on seniors is at its highest amount in more than 40 years.
- TRS retirees need a raise!

Only the Texas Legislature can approve a COLA for TRS retirees. Now is the time for a meaningful and substantial COLA for TRS retirees.



Texas Retired Teachers Association 313 E. 12th Street, Suite 200 | Austin, TX 78701 1.800.880.1650 | 512.476.1622

SECOND VICE-PRESIDENT UPDATE

Frana Patterson, TRTA Second Vice-President/Communications Chair

Hello TRTA members! Happy Holidays. I hope each one of you is celebrating with loved ones during this holiday season. We are moving ahead and trying to keep up with the status of our communities and world. Most of us can now "Zoom" and are using social media to connect with family and friends. Within TRTA, the Public Relations Committee has been renamed the Communications Committee.



Changes are challenging and communication is the key to meeting those challenges. We want to communicate with our members in local chapters as well as at-large members and, of course, our legislators. I'd like to challenge local chapters to make personal contact with each TRTA member in their area before Day at the Capitol on April 12, 2023. Consider dividing your membership list among each attendee at your next meeting, with each attendee taking the names of three members. They could send a card or give the members a call.

That is what I mean by personal contact—not a group newsletter or a post on social media, but a personal check-in. How are they? What has been happening with them? If you do this activity after a few meetings, everyone will feel included. You can also invite non-members to your meetings. You might get some new members! We are still aiming to reach 100,000 members before the 88th Legislative Session.

Some other things that need to be communicated are "Who and What is TRTA." We are not the Teacher Retirement System (TRS). We can lobby; TRS cannot. We are NOT in control of how our money is allocated, but neither is TRS! Only the Texas Legislature can determine how our money is allocated. This is why it is important to communicate with our legislators!

Have you communicated your appreciation for the support we received during the last legislative session? Do you believe our legislators will remember retired educators and give us a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) if we do not share our stories and ask for one? How many of us have had a person just randomly walk up and say to us, "Hey, I know you could use some extra income, so I'm going to give you \$5,000!" We must show appreciation, communicate with, and educate our legislators every chance we get!

Another project we hold dear is the Children's Book Project. Our goal is getting books into the hands of children. We are aware of some obstacles with the program. Visiting schools in person is becoming a challenge in some places, and choosing books that are useful and acceptable, as well as appealing to students, is a huge undertaking. We have provided guidelines in the Communications Committee Resource Guide that can be found on the TRTA website.

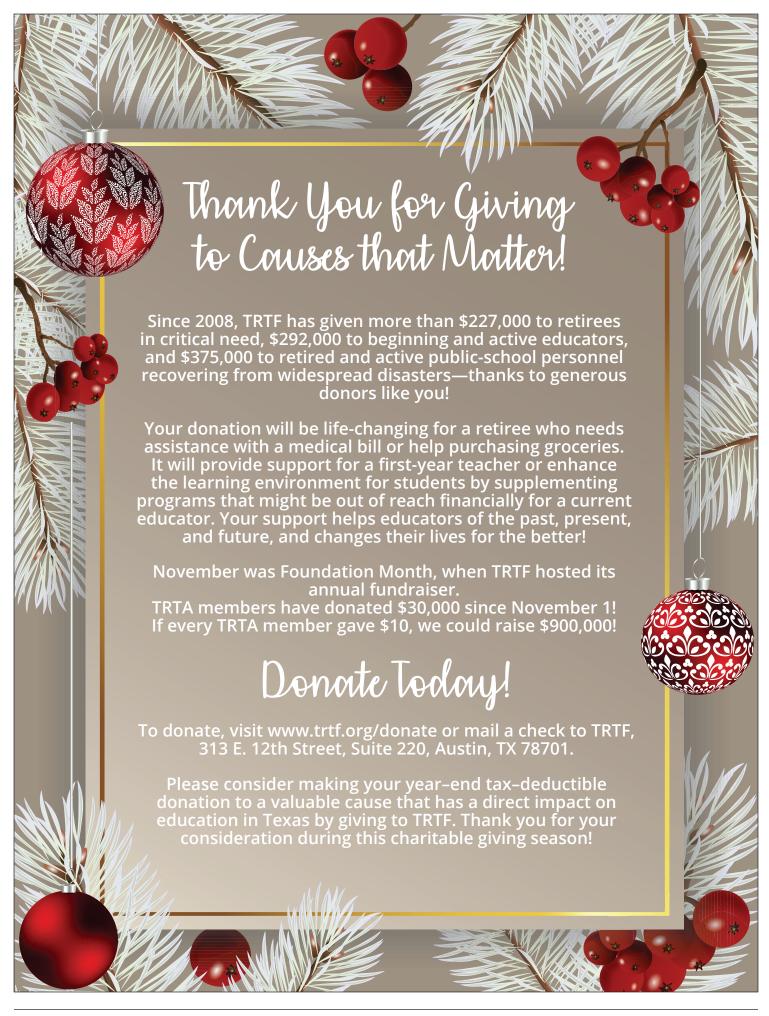
Adjustments must be made for each community. Some of you may still be able to make personal deliveries to schools, some of you may have chosen a different group to receive books, and some of you may be overwhelmed with the restraints of teachers and parents. There is also the challenge of books versus technology. Please continue with this project! Do whatever is best for you and your situation. We are extremely appreciative of the effort you give to accomplishing this goal in the way that works best for you.

I challenge each of you to find a way to contribute to improving the lives of retired school employees. Please continue to be high achievers! Share your brilliant ideas with the Communications Committee. The members are Chiqui Guerra, Linda Retzloff, Cathy Czapla, Becky Cerliano, and me, Frana Patterson, Chair. You will find multiple resources and information on the TRTA website. We are proud of the contributions each of you make to TRTA. Forge ahead JOYFULLY!

TRTA UPCOMING DEADLINES

Reports for the Children's Book Project, Volunteer Hours, Scholarships and Grants: Due February 15 and March 1

Chapter reports are due to the District Committee Chair by February 15, 2023. District reports are due to the State Committee Representative (District Children's Book Project report due to the State Committee Chair) by March 1, 2023. You can go online to submit your total number of hours volunteered at TRTA.org/cvsform. You can also submit your chapter Children's Book Project totals at TRTA.org/cbpreport.





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TRTA - Texas Retired Teachers Association





Happy Holidays to our dear members and friends!

We wish you joy, peace, and comfort this holiday season. Thank you for your dedication to TRTA's legislative efforts this year and the care you demonstrate for fellow retirees and current educators through our charitable partner, TRTF.

Health & Safety: Senior Scam Alerts

Impostor Scams: The United States Department of Justice's Transnational Elder Fraud Strike Force presents five important frauds targeting senior citizens. The first one is a Social Security Administration impostor scam. Impostors contact the senior citizens and tell them that their Social Security number has been suspended because of suspicious activity or it has been involved in a crime. They will want to confirm your Social Security number and withdraw money from your bank account to store on gift cards for safekeeping. They frighten senior citizens by telling them that their accounts may be seized or frozen if they fail to act quickly. They may use robot calls to reach their victims or tell the victim to press "1" to speak to a government support representative for help. They may use caller ID spoofing to make the call look legitimate.

Tech Support Scam: Fraudsters telephone the senior citizen claiming to be computer technicians from a well-known company. They claim that they have detected computer viruses, malware, or hacking attempts. They ask for remote access to a computer. They may then use your computer to order large quantities of expensive items that they will have shipped to a destination unknown to the computer owner, or they may ask for your bank account number to debit it for their services. Source the Federal Trade Commission

Lottery Scam: Fraudulent telemarketers from Jamaica and other foreign countries call seniors telling them that they have won a sweepstakes or foreign lottery. They claim to be lawyers, lottery representatives, or custom officials. They tell people that they have won millions of dollars, vacations, or cars. They only need to pay shipping, insurance, custom duties, and taxes to receive their winnings. The source for this article is the U.S. Embassy in Jamaica.

IRS Impostor Scams: IRS Impostor Scams are aggressive and sophisticated phone scams targeting taxpayers. Callers claim to be employees of the IRS, but they are not. They use fake names and bogus IRS identification badge numbers. Victims are told that they owe money to the IRS and it must be paid promptly through a wire transfer or stored value card such as a gift card. Victims who refuse to cooperate are threatened with arrest, deportation, or suspension of a business or driver's license. IRS Impostor Scams operating from abroad often use U.S. based "money mules" to receive victim payments and transmit proceeds to perpetrators. Source the Internal Revenue Services (Money mules are individuals that fraudsters pay a fee to transport packages to them. Often the money mules do not realize they are involved in a scheme to defraud people of their money).

Dating Scams: Millions of Americans use dating sites, social networking sites, and chat rooms to meet people, and many forge successful relationships. However, scammers also use these sites to meet potential victims. They create fake profiles to build online relationships, and eventually convince people to send money in the name of love. Some even make wedding plans before disappearing with the money. An online love interest who asks for money is almost certainly a scam artist. Romance scams operating from abroad often use U.S. based money mules to receive victim payments and transmit proceeds to perpetrators. Source the Federal Trade Commission

Start Conversations about Aging this Holiday Season with Texas Talks

For many Texans, December is a time to get together with family and friends to enjoy a good meal and conversation. These times can remind us of the importance of staying connected with family, friends and neighbors.

As you gather this holiday season, consider discussing your plans for your future with your loved ones. While many of us understand that it is important to plan for the future, knowing how to start the conversation can be challenging.

There are many components of planning for our older years to consider, including housing, social connection, mental health support, health screenings, trauma-informed care and recreation. While this might seem overwhelming, starting this conversation early, and ideally before a crisis, is important.

The Texas Health and Human Services Aging Services Coordination office created Texas Talks to help make these conversations easier. Texas Talks helps people talk with their family and friends about aging and needs that may arise. It also encourages people of all ages to think about how they would like to spend their older years.

Every November and December, Texas Talks releases four new topics with the idea that each topic will encourage conversations and hopefully an action plan.

Texas Talks provides resources and worksheets to help get the conversation started. Before talking with your loved ones, consider the following questions:

- 1. Identify what is important to you. What are your concerns? Think about if you would like to age in place. What parts of your life do you want to make sure you plan for? Thinking about these things before talking to your loved ones can help you plan the conversation.
- Pinpoint the people in your life you would like to involve in these conversations. Consider family, friends or close neighbors who will affirm your preferences and have the time and space to be an active listener.
- 3. Pick a time, place and venue. Maybe it will be at a planned gathering or perhaps you would prefer to have a conversation over the phone.
- 4. Reflect after the conversation and create an action plan. Having supportive and encouraging conversations about aging will ideally result in action steps. These conversations can make everyone feel better, and it can be a huge relief to have a plan in place.

Aging Services Coordination encourages you to start the conversation with your loved ones. To get started with Texas Talks, go to the Aging Well Resources Order Form and type "Texas Talks" in the resource name box. Learn more by visiting the Texas Talks website.

Written by: Claire Irwin, HHS Age Well Live Well Coordinator



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The Texas Retired Teachers Association (TRTA) is excited to announce our Day at the Capitol event on Wednesday, April 12, 2023! Retired public educators in Texas have not been able to convene on the Capitol lawn since 2019. We are looking forward to meeting with legislators, advocating for a much-needed costof-living adjustment (COLA), and enjoying fellowship during an oldfashioned ice cream social next April.

As TRTA leaders and staff continue to make plans for the event, we are letting members know to SAVE THE DATE!

The main event will occur on April 12. TRTA has secured rooms and meeting space at the downtown Austin Hilton hotel for those who prefer to travel into the city the day before (April 11) and who want to begin the festivities early!

Room reservations are still available at the Hilton and are best made online to ensure TRTA members receive the lowest room rate. Please visit www.trta.org/dac2023 to make your reservation. The cost of hotel rooms is \$229 (single and double), \$249 (triple), and \$269 (quad). Please note, these rates do not include tax. Onsite parking will be \$20 per night, a discounted rate just for TRTA members.

Please note, TRTA will also require an RSVP for all Day at the Capitol attendees in order to collect an accurate headcount for all events; however, the RSVP will not be available until January 2023. Please stay tuned to the Inside Line, as well as the first quarter issue of The VOICE, for this information.

While TRTA still has many details to coordinate for this event, we plan to offer optional sessions on the afternoon of April 11 at the Hilton, as well as a lively soiree that evening in the Governor's Ballroom. All TRTA members are welcome to attend these events whether they choose to stay at the hotel or not. (The projected times for these events are 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. for the sessions, and 6:00 p.m. for the evening soiree. Please note, these times are subject to change).

On April 12, TRTA will provide shuttle service from the Hilton to the Capitol. For those not staying at the hotel and traveling in the morning of April 12, parking is available at the Capitol Visitors Parking Garage one block from the east lawn, where TRTA will greet members at a tent and distribute advocacy items. Parking garage rates are free for the first 2 hours, \$1 for each half hour thereafter, with a maximum daily charge of \$12.

In years past, members headed to the House Gallery around 9:30 a.m. to hear a resolution honoring TRS retirees. Likewise, members can head to the Senate Gallery around 10:30 a.m. to hear a similar resolution. Ice cream will be served on the East Lawn under the tent between 12:30 and 2:00 p.m. Legislators often join us to enjoy the sweet treats and share words of encouragement between these hours as well. Attendees are encouraged to set appointments with their legislators' offices at a time convenient to them, their elected officials, and/or legislative staffers.

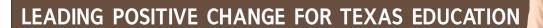
Final details about April 11 and 12, including a detailed schedule, will be available in the next issue of The VOICE, in members' mailboxes by late February.

All TRTA members are welcome, and we hope to see you and your friends and colleagues at the Texas Capitol next April! 🛣





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LOCAL CHAPTERS RAISE AWARENESS
Thank you to all who have supported TRTF!

Donation card on the back of *The VOICE*

TRTF GRANT AND SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS AVAILABLE NOW!

Classroom Assistance Grants are awarded to Texas public school teachers who, on a daily basis, demonstrate commitment to public education and Texas children through the creation of programs, events, or other learning platforms.



TRTF will award 30 \$750 grants to 30 public school teachers in Texas for the 2023-2024 school year. Previous grant recipients have used the funds for items and projects such as theater equipment and stage makeup, an outdoor learning garden, manipulatives, and piano books.

The Beginning Teacher Scholarship reimburses an applicant for certification tests and test results and provides money to help the applicant purchase classroom materials for his or her first year of teaching.

TRTF will award 20 \$750 scholarships for the 2023-2024 school year to college seniors who are earning an undergraduate degree at a Texas university or college, or first-year public-school educators.

If you would like to help promote TRTF's programs, please consider sharing our two new Foundation Month videos featuring recent Classroom Assistant Grant and Beginning Teacher Scholarship recipients.

Grant winner Corrine Thompson is a Gifted and Talented teacher at Mildred Junior High in Corsicana. With her funds, she invited Jiann Powers—a professional storyteller experienced with youth—to conduct a workshop on the art of oral tradition with her students. As a result, her students created a portfolio of stories to share with audiences.

Scholarship winner Rylie Roark is a Texas History teacher at Reading Junior High in Richmond. She used her funds to pay for a teaching certification test as well as history posters and other classroom materials. Rylie is related to TRTA member Sara Post Meyer of the DeWitt County RSP local chapter.

Pictured to the left is Rylie Roark and TRTF Senior Operations and Programs Advisor Sarah Richardson.

The videos were released through Tim Lee's *Inside Line* email newsletter and can also be viewed on www.trtf.org.

Continued on next page



PLEASE DOWNLOAD AN APPLICATION TODAY!

Applications for both the Classroom Assistance Grant and Beginning Teacher Scholarship programs are available at www.trtf.org/initiatives. All applications must be received by 5:00 p.m. on Friday, January 27, 2023. Applications received after the deadline will not be considered. The names of the grant and scholarship recipients will be announced on Friday, March 31, 2023. Winners will be notified by email, and the names of the recipients will be shared on the TRTF website and Facebook.

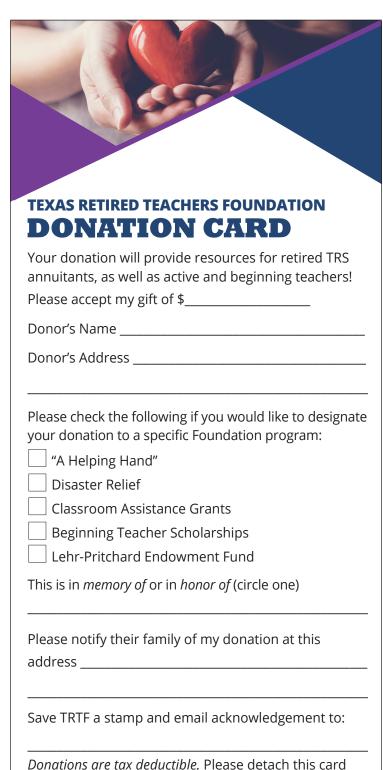


LOCAL CHAPTERS RAISE AWARENESS

The Texas Retired Teachers Foundation (TRTF) would like to thank all local chapters that have dedicated time during their fall meetings to discuss the good deeds of TRTF. We would not be able to sustain or expand our charitable programs without your support!

We appreciate your efforts to share the Foundation's goals and successes. Many chapters used fun, creative fundraisers such as silent auctions, garage sales, chili cook-offs, and bake sales to raise donations during Foundation Month.

For materials for local chapter or district meetings such as "Talking Points" or brochures (which include donation cards), please contact Sarah Richardson at sarah@trta.org.



and mail to: Texas Retired Teachers Foundation (TRTF)

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