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*"A Teacher*

*takes a hand*

*Opens a Mind &*

*Touches a Heart"*

*Unknown*

## A Message from the President

Greetings,

My name is Candy Hilliard and I will be serving as your president of the Smith County Retired Teachers and School Personnel Association this year. I am the eldest daughter of Ray and Carolyn Womack, who have been associated with this organization for many years. I am proud to continue that legacy.

Due to the current situation with COVID-19, the initiatives I wanted to propose for this year have had to be adapted.

The first initiative involves the membership of new retirees. Every year dozens of teachers retire in Smith County. I would like us to develop a systematic approach to obtaining a list of new retirees, how to contact them and then how to involve them in our organization. This objective would be accomplished through our Committees. I'd love to see new members become involved being mentored into positions of leadership.

The last thing I'd like to see is an active PHONE Tree or Communication Tree.



Communication is vital to our success as an organization, and we do not all use the same method to accomplish this task. Getting information to our members in the easiest, quickest way could help when schedules change, legislation requires our attention, or a reminder of meetings is needed to reach our members. This is especially important for us during our current period of isolation. We have members who could use a friendly voice, e-mail or text as often as possible.

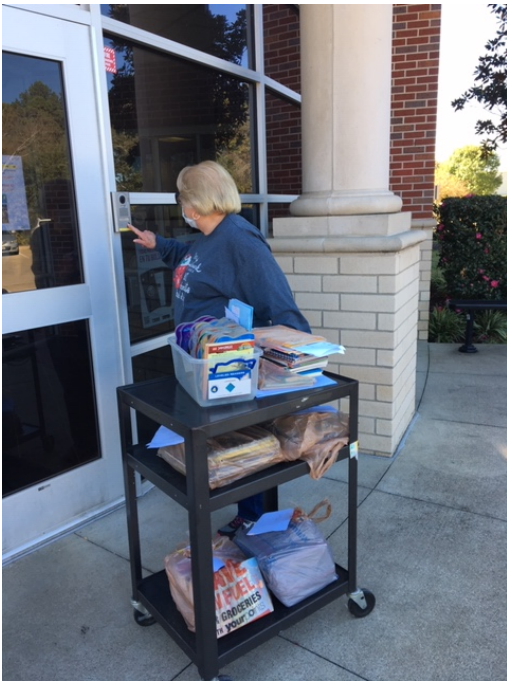
I hope you will be excited to join me this year and help involve not only our current members but new members, benefitting our organization as well as our community.

*Candy Hilliard, President*

# Book Project

The Smith County Retired School Teachers and School Personnel Association collect books to distribute to elementary schools within our county. A different elementary school is selected each year. Students are given a book of their very own to take home.

Each year members who volunteer to serve on the book project committee sort books by grade level. A sticker is placed in the books indicating they were donated by the organization. Book Project members met several times for several hours to accomplish this. This year members who helped were Kay Elliott, Susan Ellis, Dorothy Satterwhite, Martha Garraway, Jean Fuller, Ann Rice, Ginger Pratt, Jo Veazey, and Linda Keener. Lynn Fisher and Gladys Cooper were Book Project Co-Chairs.



Gladys Delivering Books



Books Delivered to Griffin

This year has been difficult because of COVID-19. Even with this obstacle, books were distributed. 100 books were distributed to the Chapel Hill Middle School ESL Department in August.

687 books were donated to Griffin Elementary School in November: Special thanks to Jo Veazey for helping with loading books and getting this large number of books to Griffin Elementary School.

When we gather again for meetings, we will want to collect books for this important project.

*Gladys Cooper, Book Project Co-Chair*

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## A Different Beginning

Yes, we are late getting started this year, and we are blaming it on COVID-19. This is our first newsletter with others to follow. The TRTA office asked us to cancel our meetings through March 2021. TRTA cancelled the State Conference scheduled for April 2021 but will hold a virtual.

Our new officers are managing their tasks very well under the restrictions of COVID-19. We have added some young, enthusiastic, and active retirees to the list of officers: Candy Hilliard as president, Kay Pleasant as 2nd vice-president, and Cynthia Pettigrew as our new historian. We are fortunate to add these officers to lead with the current enthusiastic and active officers who served last year.

Directories were mailed to all members in December. Please let Kay Pleasant know if you did not receive one. (903) 570-7823.

TRTA is not issuing the usual membership card this year. It is recommended that we use the mailing label on the VOICE bulletin for membership information. The ID number is printed above the name on the label. It will fit neatly with other business cards.

Plans are being made for ways we can continue with the traditions and new ideas of our members during this pandemic. We will host our January meeting using Zoom and will seek other opportunities to exchange information and make good decisions. We will continue to work around COVID-19 to stay connected.

*Margret Montgomery Sheffield*

## Give a Lift in Difficult Times

The introduction of the Coronavirus disrupted our social relationships, and some may be experiencing isolation, depression and loneliness.

A simple phone call just to check on a friend or loved one can dispel depressive emotions for a period of time. A surprise "thinking of you" mixed in with the bills and advertisements bring a lift to the human spirit. A knock on the door from someone in the neighborhood just to check on our needs brings joy and a sense of peace. Contact with others during this time, especially those who are alone, contributes to our well-being. Many people who were lonely before the virus interrupted our lives welcome the sound of a friendly voice.

We can lift spirits, spread warm and caring words, express concern, dispel loneliness, and communicate positive messages to others during this difficult period of isolation. In the process we may even improve our own well-being and lift our own spirit.

*Margret Montgomery Sheffield*

# Legislative

## TRTA 2021 Legislative Priorities

### STATE ISSUES

#### TRS Pension Fund

ACTION ITEM: Preserve the funding plan enacted during the 86th Legislature (SB 12)

- Keep the TRS pension fund on the path to actuarial soundness
- Ensure SB 12 phase-in plan raising contribution rates to 8% for state/educators, and 1.8% for ISDs by 2022

ACTION ITEM: Secure a financial structure capable of providing a future COLA

- Average TRS monthly annuity is \$2096
- Half of all TRS annuitants receive less than \$1800 per month
- Members retiring during the last 16 years have never had a permanent increase in their annuity
- Consider additional revenue source by requiring all employers to contribute equally

#### TRS-Care

ACTION ITEM: Maintain contribution for TRS-Care retiree health insurance

- Vulnerability to COVID-19 necessitates affordable, easy access to doctors and care
- Avoid increased premiums and cuts in services or benefits
- Study and design long term funding structure
- Allow one-time re-enrollment to TRS-CareSunset Review

ACTION ITEM: Adopt TRS Sunset Staff Report and additional TRTA recommendations\*

- Promote a member-focused and friendly culture at TRS
- Direct TRS to designate an FTE position as a TRS member ombudsman focused on the needs and issues of TRS members, including the impact of COVID-19
- Direct TRS to simplify and clearly define reasonable rules for return to work and part time employees
- Create appeals process for disallowed health care claims

*\*See TRTA Position Paper for TRS Sunset recommendations and TRTA recommendations*

### FEDERAL ISSUES

#### Social Security

ACTION ITEM: Ensure earned Social Security benefits are paid to retirees

- Reform WEP and GPO current formulas that unfairly penalize Texas retired educators
- Retirees' traditional supplemental income has been impacted by pandemic (substitute teaching, bus driving)
- Prevent mandatory Social Security as a resolution to the inequity of WEP and GPO

# Legislative Continued

It is important that we email or call our legislators and ask them to support the TRTA 2021 Legislative Priorities. There is power in numbers and it is our responsibility to make sure they hear from each one of us.

*Mark Wagstaff*

A list of our State and National Officials are on the following page.

## WEP (Windfall Elimination Provision)

The WEP (Windfall Elimination Provision) needs to be reformed. I know that a lot of you will not receive a Social Security benefit of your own, but there are some of us who will. Kevin Brady (R-The Woodlands) has been our champion in Congress for many years to try and get this provision reformed so that it is fairer to those who receive a pension, such as TRS. He said the WEP “has punished the people we ought to be rewarding.” For example, I will receive \$160 less from the Social Security benefit that I am entitled to because of my TRS pension. What I will receive is not even enough to pay my Part B Medicare.

You can read more about Representative Brady’s bill to reform the WEP in the Second Quarter edition of TRTA’s The Voice magazine on page 3. I am asking you to please show your support for the WEP reform by contacting your Representative and asking him/her to sign on to Kevin Brady’s bill, HR 3934 or Richie Neal’s bill, HR 4540. It’s critical to get as many congressional Representatives signed on to these bills as possible. **You can find your Representative’s information by visiting [www.govtrack.us/congress/members](http://www.govtrack.us/congress/members).**

I and others who are affected by the WEP would really appreciate your support in contacting your congressman/woman to try and right this injustice.

*Jean Fuller*

# State and National Officials

## **GOVERNOR**

Greg Abbott

P. O. Box 12428, Austin, TX 78711-2428, 800-843-5789

[www.gov.texas.gov](http://www.gov.texas.gov)

## **SENATORS**

Sen. Bryan Hughes, District 1

P. O. Box 12068, Capitol Station, Austin, TX 78711-2068, 512-463-0101

District Office: 701 N. Pacific Ave, P.O Box 450 Mineola, TX 75773, 903-569-8880

[Bryan.hughes@senate.texas.gov](mailto:Bryan.hughes@senate.texas.gov)

Sen. Bob Hall, District 2

P. O. Box 12068, Capitol Station, Austin, TX 78711-2068, 512-463-0102

District Office: 17585 State Highway 19, Suite 200 Canton, TX 75103, 903-567-0531

[Bob.hall@senate.texas.gov](mailto:Bob.hall@senate.texas.gov)

Sen. Robert Nichols, District 3

P. O. Box 12068, Capitol Station, Austin, TX 78711-2068, 512-463-0103

District Office: 329 Neches St., Jacksonville, TX 75766, 903-589-3003

[Robert.nichols@senate.texas.gov](mailto:Robert.nichols@senate.texas.gov)

## **REPRESENTATIVES**

Rep. Cole Hefner, District 5

P. O. Box 2910, Capitol Station, Austin, TX 78768-2910, 512-463-0271

District Office: 520 North Main Street, Suite A-3, Lindale, Texas 75711, 903-882-3254

[Cole.hefner@house.texas.gov](mailto:Cole.hefner@house.texas.gov)

Rep. Matt Schaefer, District 6

P.O. Box 2910, Capitol Station, Austin, TX 78768-2910, 512-463-0584

District Office: 200 E Ferguson, Suite 506, Tyler, TX 75702, 903-592-0900

[Matt.schafer@house.texas.gov](mailto:Matt.schafer@house.texas.gov)

Rep. Cody Harris, District 8

P. O. Box 2910, Capitol Station, Austin, TX 78768-2910, 512-463-0730

District Office: 214 E Elm, P.O. Box 278, Hillsboro, TX 76645, 254-582-4081

[Cody.harris@house.texas.gov](mailto:Cody.harris@house.texas.gov)

Rep. Travis Clardy, District 11

P.O. Box 2910, Capitol Station, Austin, TX 78768-2910, 512-463-0592

District Office: 202 East Pilar, Room 310, Nacogdoches, Texas 75961, 936-560-3982

[Travis.clardy@house.texas.gov](mailto:Travis.clardy@house.texas.gov)

## **UNITED STATES CONGRESS**

Sen. Ted Cruz

Capitol Office: 404 Russell, Washington, DC 20510, 202-224-5922

Tyler Office: 305 S Broadway, Suite 501, Tyler, TX 75702, 903-593-5130

[www.cruz.senate.gov](http://www.cruz.senate.gov)

Sen. John Cornyn

Capitol Office: 517 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510-4305; 202-224-2934

District Office: 100 E. Ferguson, Suite 1004, Tyler, TX 75702, 903-593-0902

[www.cornyn.senate.gov](http://www.cornyn.senate.gov)

Rep. Louie Gohmert, District 1

Capitol Office: 2267 Rayburn HOB, Washington, D.C. 20515; 202-225-3035

District Office: 1121 ESE Loop 323, Suite 206, Tyler, TX 75701, 903-561-6349

[www.gohmert.house.gov](http://www.gohmert.house.gov)

# VOLUNTEER!

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This year volunteer opportunities for many of us have changed. To keep ourselves and our families safe, it may be difficult to get out and go to some of our usual activities. Because of this, we likely need to help people in our communities even more.

Here are some things we can still do --

- Phone Tree calls for SCRTSPA or another organization
- Make phone calls for wellness checks
- Be a caregiver (even for family members)
- Provide food for families or funerals
- Pick up trash and limbs at a park
- Tutor online or over the phone
- Write letters to people in need
- Run errands for friends or neighbors who can't get out
- Encourage donations to the TRTA Foundation

If you have any other ideas you would like to share please call, text, or email me. You should count everything you do for someone else, as long as you receive no monetary compensation for it. When you sit down to make phone calls or write letters and emails, just set a timer and record the amount of time you spend. If you go somewhere to do volunteer work, remember to count your prep time and travel time.

We will begin contacting members to collect 2020 hours soon.

THANK YOU FOR ALL YOU DO!

Susan Ellis  
Community Volunteer Services  
Sjellis79@gmail.com  
903-530-8014

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# January and February Events

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January 12, 2021 2:00 PM	Managing Change and Installation of Officers	Virtual*
February 9, 2021 2:00 PM	Membership Drive: Recruit and Retain New Members	Virtual*

\* A Zoom invitation will be sent to all members on the Monday before each meeting

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## Smith County Retired Teachers and School Personnel

SCRTSPA  
12193 CR 2175  
Whitehouse, TX 75791



<http://www.localunits.org/smith/>



<https://www.facebook.com/groups/91824048505252>