



FALL 2023

Wise Owl News

from the Tree of Knowledge



ROCK ISLAND COUNTY RETIRED TEACHERS FOUNDATION
BLACKHAWK UNIT 21 IRTA

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Meeting Dates | 1 |
| President's Message | 2 |
| State Convention News | 2 |
| Unit 21 Activities | 3 |
| Foundation Report | 3 |
| Brunch Reservation | 4 |
| Membership Report | 4 |
| Treasurer's Report | 5 |
| State IRTA News | 5 |
| Legislative Update | 5 |



BLACKHAWK UNIT 21 RETIRED TEACHERS MEETINGS

are held at the

QUAD CITY BOTANICAL CENTER
2525 Fourth Avenue, Rock Island IL

Board Meeting – 8:15 AM
Social Hour – 9:15 AM
Business Session – 9:45 AM

SEPTEMBER 13: “Welcoming New Retirees to IRTA

9:00 AM – Breakfast at Oakwood Country Club

Speakers: Jim Bachman, John Flaherty, Doug Strand & Mike Schmidt

Introduction by Joe Vermeire

Greeters: Virginia Shaffer, Nancy Licko, Virginia Payton & Bobbi Lastrapes

OCTOBER 11: “Benefits, Benefits, Benefits ... A Review of Available AMBA Programs”

Speaker: Ms. Chery Setser, Association Members Benefits Advisor

Introduction by Gloria Wisley

Greeters: Julie Riney & Lynne Rumler Servers: Joan Beck & Kathy Killam

NOVEMBER 8: “Veterans Program and Memorial Service”

Speaker: To be announced

Introduction by John Flaherty

Greeters: Loryann Eis & Andy Jones Servers: Karen Anderson & Maria Sullivan

ATTENTION MEMBERS:

Please help build our membership and attend the 2023 Breakfast for Retirees.

THANK YOU!!

| Newsletter | Articles Due | Mailing Date |
|------------|--------------|--------------|
| Winter | 11/13/23 | 11/20/23 |

PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE – JOE VERMEIRE

Fall 2023 Issue and exciting times lay ahead for Blackhawk Unit 21 IRTA members! We are looking forward to our September 13th New Retirees Breakfast at the Oakwood Country Club. A delicious breakfast, friendly faces and informative program await your attendance. Grab a friend and please make your reservations by using the registration form found in this newsletter. The Breakfast Meeting will feature soon retiring IRTA Executive Director, Jim Bachman, traveling from Springfield, to bring us the latest news. TRS Board Member Doug Strand will ensure us of our pension benefits. Past IRTA President John Flaherty and local leaders will fill in the agenda with newsworthy information. An extra bonus will be our own Michael Schmidt, who is running for State IRTA President, spending a bit of time on his vision for the organization. And of course, a wonderful breakfast menu culminating in my favorite Sticky Buns! We need your participation to make this a successful event. And you’ll like the Sticky Buns as much as I do! Promise!

Vice-President Scott Turnipseed has again put together fun and educational programming for our monthly QC Botanical Center meetings. October 11th will find us learning more about AMBA benefits. November 8th is our “Veterans Day Program” and our annual Unit Memorial Service. And of course, December 13th will be our “Sing in Holidays Program” with the Rock Island HS Choir and Choral Director Scott Voigt. Which reminds me of prior performances by this group. Standing Ovation!!! They were soooo good! We look forward to seeing many of you returning to IRTA and friends. Yes, IRTA goals are as vital and necessary as ever and we value your involvement, membership and having fun.

Involvement and membership are very important. At the August monthly Board Meeting, I was informed that there are 984 state educator pension annuitants in Rock Island County and 66% of them are Blackhawk Unit 21 IRTA members! Wow...Terrific!!! 639 retired Rock Island County educators understand the importance of membership in an organization that continuously fights to protect their pension and benefits. And don’t be naïve; constant vigilance is necessary. We can’t all be down in Springfield looking through thousands of bills and checking politicians seeking to balance budgets. IRTA is there and our involvement and membership support those efforts. \$15 membership dues for Blackhawk Unit 21 are a small cost, but a good investment, to stay informed. And our numbers help local politicians see our voting power. Please continue that support and let’s get that membership up to 984!

Blessings, Joe

IRTA CONVENTION 2023

The biennial IRTA State Convention will be held **October 16-17, 2023**, at the Crowne Plaza in Springfield, Illinois. The last meeting was ZOOMED in 2021, but the in-person 2023 event is gaining a bit of a buzz with rare Constitutional amendments in the mix and the last presiding role for retiring Executive Director Jim Bachman.

Your local Blackhawk Unit will soon be receiving information about its number of designated delegates. If you are interested in serving as one of these delegates, please contact President Joe Vermeire at 309-269-2631 or any of the other officers listed in the Blackhawk Unit 21 Directory.

BLACKHAWK UNIT 21 IRTA 2023 CONVENTION HONOREE



Nancy Ann McManus will be honored at the 2023 State IRTA Convention Recognition Banquet on October 16, 2023 at the Springfield Crowne Plaza Hotel. Nancy was chosen for this award because of her “Caring and Compassion of Fellow Retirees”, her “Duty to and Diligence of Responsibilities”, and her “Respect and Commitment to Blackhawk Unit 21 IRTA”.

Nancy is currently Treasurer and Membership Chair but has served in so many different capacities. Nancy retired as Math Department Head from Moline High School in 2000. Previous Blackhawk Unit 21 Honorees include: 2007 – Ed Mitchell; 2009 – Loryann Eis; 2011 – John Flaherty; 2013 – Joann Dennis; 2015 – Jan Corsaro; 2019 – Phillip Dennis; and 2021 – Michael Schmidt.

A-TISKET-A-TASKET A BLACKHAWK UNIT 21 BASKET



At this year's biennial IRTA State Convention our Blackhawk Unit will be creating a basket for a silent auction. The proceeds will go to the IRTA Pac, and the contents will go to the lucky winner. What contents? That's the question. We would like to have items from the Quad Cities to put in the basket (or two).

So, if you would like to donate such things as bottles of wine stomped and bottled in the QCA, non-perishable food items produced here, or decorative nick-nacks created here that would be a big help. Cash with which to purchase such items would be useful too, even though it isn't printed in the Quad Cities (OR SHOULDN'T BE)! Any donated items can be given to any of the unit's officers, OR BETTER YET, bring them with you when you attend this year's September 13th unit breakfast at Oakwood Country Club.

BLACKHAWK UNIT 21 QUILT RAFFLE



Join the excitement as the IRTA Foundation hosts a unique raffle. The prize? A stunning handmade quilt, **thanks to Past IRTA President John Flaherty's wife, Glenda Flaherty** and friend, Kay Ostrom, for their craft and donation.

All monies generated from this raffle will support the IRTA Foundation and its philanthropic endeavors. Thank you for your generosity. The IRTA Foundation is dedicated to: Providing financial aid to retired teachers experiencing financial hardships, Administering the 'Excellence in Education' grant program, giving away \$42,000 in funds to Illinois public school teachers from Pre-K through 12, and Awarding scholarships to promising college students who are pursuing their teacher certification. Ticket costs are seen below and can be purchased online:
1 for \$5; 3 for \$10; 7 for \$15 (Save \$15); and 20 for \$50 (Save \$50).

The drawing will be held on October 17, 2023 during the Biennial Convention. The winner will not need to be present to win.

IRTA FOUNDATION REPORT – MICHAEL DALY

Thank you to everyone who participated in the 2023 "Birdies for Charity" event. Pledges totaled \$2,320.00 and 37 BHU members participated. The check from John Deere will be presented on October 31, 2023. There will also be a bonus added to the total. Last year a 7% bonus was added to the money pledged. A final Birdies event accounting will appear in the Winter newsletter as well as the announcement of the \$50 prize winner for the best total birdies in 2023 guess contest

The Foundation checking account balance is \$2,768.78. We will be awarding grants to local Rock Island County high schools and non-profit community agencies in January 2024. The focus of those grants are student achievement and community support.

PLEASE JOIN US FOR THE IRTA SEPTEMBER BRUNCH

RESERVATION PAYMENT DUE FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 2023

DATE: Wednesday, September 13, 2023

PLACE: Oakwood Country Club, Coal Valley, Illinois

TIME: 9:00 A.M.

PROGRAM: Welcoming New Retirees to the IRTA

Please complete the form below and send it with a check payable to BLACKHAWK UNIT – IRTA to: Scott Turnipseed, 3548 49th Street, Moline, Illinois 61265. If you have any questions, call Scott Turnipseed at 309-737-1508 or Mike Schmidt at 309-737-5245. ***No reservation will be accepted by phone; no reservation will be accepted without payment.***

NUMBER of Breakfast Reservations** _____ @ \$20.00 = _____
ANNUAL 2024 BLACKHAWK UNIT DUES _____ @ \$15.00 = _____
(NO dues are needed for Local Life Members)
AMOUNT (Check ONLY enclosed) **TOTAL** = _____

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY/STATE: _____

EMAIL: _____

PHONE: _____

** Please include the names of any GUEST retirees you are bringing here: _____

MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE – NANCY MCMANUS

As of August 14, 2023 local IRTA Blackhawk Unit 21 has 639 members. Since the Wise Owl Summer 2023 newsletter was published in May, the following members have died – Harvey Erikson, Ben McAdams and Steve Pyevich.

We will begin collecting **2024 local dues (\$15.00)** when we take reservations for the September 13 Breakfast at Oakwood Country Club. **For** members to be included in the 2024 Directory, **dues must be paid by December 31, 2023.** Dues should be mailed to the IRTA Treasurer at:

Nancy McManus
3620 – 33rd Avenue
Rock Island, Illinois 61201

Checks are to be made payable to **Blackhawk Unit 21 – IRTA.** Please verify that your name, address and phone number are correctly listed in the 2023 Directory and include the following information with your check:

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email Address: _____

NOTE: If you will be 90 or older in 2023 or 2024, contact Nancy McManus at (309) 794-0490 with your name and date of birth. At age 90, both local and State IRTA Membership dues will be listed as LIFE and no further dues will be due, HOWEVER, your birthdate must be filed with the state IRTA office.

TREASURER'S REPORT – NANCY MCMANUS

At the October 2023 IRTA convention there will be a vote to increase the State IRTA Dues for 2024 on the following scale:

| | 2023 CURRENT AMOUNT | 2024 PROPOSED AMOUNT |
|------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Dues Deduct | \$2.50/month | \$3.50/month |
| Life Membership | \$400.00 | \$600.00 |
| Annual | \$40.00 | \$50.00 |
| Annual Recurring | \$38.00 | \$46.00 |
| 5- year | \$175.00 | no change for 2024 |
| Associate | \$25.00 | \$35.00 |
| Associate Life | \$125.00 | \$200.00 |

LOCAL BLACKHAWK UNIT DUES WILL NOT CHANGE FOR 2024

The deadline for payment of 2024 local dues is December 31, 2023. Any changes in the 2024 state dues will not go into effect until January 1, 2024 since the vote for dues increases will be taken on October 16-17, 2023.

Dues Increase: A Necessary Investment in the Future of Our Organization STATE IRTA FINANCE TREASURER - DONNIE OSTROM

A notice of the "Dues Investment Proposal" was included in the IRTA *Action* newsletter of June 5, 2023. As treasurer, I recommended these increases in the dues structure starting in 2024. The recommendation was proposed, discussed, and passed by the Finance Committee and the Membership Committee. The proposal was then presented to the Executive Board, and they approved it as an item on the Convention docket. The Association's dues have not been changed in ten years and, in some cases, more than ten years. In order to maintain our viability, sustainability, meet the goals set by the IRTA Board of Directors, and be an effective organization for you, this proposal's passage is necessary.

Since the proposal appeared in the *Action* newsletter, several individuals have asked me about the need to increase dues. The costs of operations and lobbying have been impacted by increases in salaries, inflation, mailing, travel, utilities, and technology. If the IRTA is to continue to be successful in securing our pension and insurance benefits, this proposal's passage is imperative. We have scaled back and slowed down on purchasing new technologies and some programs because of maintaining a balanced budget. We must be able to effectively communicate with members, and they with the Association, no matter where they live.

There will be a discussion and vote at the October Convention to approve this proposal. It should be clear that the organization has always maintained a balanced budget and has been frugal with your dues. But if we are to be successful in the future, increase membership, and communicate with our members, the passage of this proposal is necessary.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE – JOHN FLAHERTY

There is now much happening in Springfield as I write this. Governor Pritzker is still signing bills that were passed and our legislators are back home. Our legislators were able to agree on a raise for themselves and now make about \$80,000 a year while many also have a full-time job back at home.

This summer they are having hearings about what the fix should be for Tier II workers. Anyone who was first hired after January 1, 2011 is a Tier II. They cannot get full benefits until age 67. They cannot use any sick days towards their retirement credit. Their calculation is based on the average of the eight best consecutive years in their last ten years. They will not get a 3% compounded yearly raise but will instead get ½ of the yearly inflation rate. Since Tier II legislation passed, Illinois has seen far fewer out-of-state educators looking to get certified in Illinois. Education was a big beneficiary this year. Some of the budget items are listed below.

Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools (IARSS) Report Early Childhood Education and Childcare Funding

A highlight of the budget is \$250 million to fund the first year of Smart Start Illinois, the Governor's early childhood initiative to eliminate preschool deserts, stabilize the childcare workforce, and expand the Early Intervention and Home Visiting programs. This multi-year program provides a comprehensive approach to investments in preparing children to be lifelong learners. Year one targeted investments include the following:

- An additional \$75 million for the Early Childhood Block Grant at the Illinois State Board of Education to increase preschool availability while improving the quality of education. This funding is the first step in working to eliminate "preschool deserts" by December 2027 through adding more than 20,000 slots for preschool aged children and the ability to serve thousands more infants and toddlers through the Prevention Initiative. This brings funding for the Early Childhood Block Grant program to nearly \$673 million, \$179 million more than when Governor Pritzker took office.
- Invests \$130 million and additional federal dollars to begin funding for Early Childhood Workforce Compensation Contracts to stabilize operational funding and promote quality in the childcare system. The proposed development of the contract funding model stems from recommendations made by the Early Childhood Funding Commission.
- Invests an additional \$40 million for Early Intervention programs to provide funds for an expected increase in participants and a 10 percent rate increase for providers.
- \$5 million to expand DHS' Home Visiting Program.

Additional early childhood investments to support the plan include the following:

- \$70 million to cover an expected increase in Childcare Assistance Program (CCAP) participation and annualize rate increases from Fiscal Year 2023.
- \$20 million to begin upgrading the childcare payment management system.
- Federal funding for Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity (ECACE) Scholarships for tuition, fees and other costs of attendance.
- \$1.6 million to launch Dolly Parton's Imagination Library statewide, an initiative that allows families to register their children to receive free, high-quality books in the mail from birth to age five no matter the family's income.

K-12 Education

- \$350 million increase for K-12 evidence-based funding (EBF) formula. ISBE uses the tiered formula to distribute state funding based on need. This investment brings the total annual EBF program to \$8.279 billion, or a \$1.443 billion increase in annual base funding during the Pritzker administration. In total, schools will have received an additional \$4.0 billion in EBF funds over five years.
- \$45 million for the first year of a three-year pilot to fill teacher vacancies, plus additional investments in scholarships for future teachers. The funding will be allocated to the State's school districts which experience some of the most significant hurdles to attract and retain teachers.
- \$3 million for computer science education investments to expand grants to school districts and professional development opportunities for teachers while promoting equitable access to coursework.

Higher Education

The Fiscal Year 2024 budget continues to make college more affordable with historic increases in funding for public universities, community colleges and financial aid.

- \$100 million increase to \$701 million for Monetary Assistance Program (MAP) grant funding, so that virtually everyone at or below the median income can go to community college for free. This funding is the latest step in a 75 percent increase for MAP since 2019.
- \$100 million increase in operating funds for public universities (\$80.5 million) and community

- colleges (\$19.4 million) – the highest increases in more than two decades
- Increases funding for AIM HIGH merit-based scholarships by \$15 million to a total of \$50 million. HB301 will make the program permanent.
 - Includes new funding to support community college investments, including: \$8.3 million for dual-credit and non-credit workforce grant programs; \$11 million for curriculum development related to advanced manufacturing, electric vehicle and data center workforce training programs; \$2 million for technology upgrades for digital instruction in WIOA Title II Adult Education programs; and \$750,000 to expand English language services to non-English speaking communities.
 - An additional \$3.8 million for the Minority Teacher Scholarship program.
 - Continues funding of \$25 million for the Pipeline for the Advancement of the Healthcare (PATH) Workforce Program, to train new nurses, medical assistants, medical laboratory technicians, emergency medical technicians and other high-demand positions.
 - Additional funds for the Diversifying Higher Education Faculty in Illinois (DFI) program to provide holistic supports for fellows, beyond their stipend. This would include a new orientation program, conference attendance, and a graduate symposium to help them prepare for and find employment in Illinois.
 - Includes \$3 million for the Department of Public Health (DPH) to implement the Equity and Representation in Health Care Workforce Repayment Program and Scholarship Program per PA 102-0942. The state also placed \$200 million additional pension payment beyond what's required, bringing total pension stabilization investments to \$700 million. This is less than TRS requested but every dollar is appreciated.

Thank you for belonging to our IRTA!

John Flaherty
Past President, Illinois Retired Teachers Association

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| <p>Governor: JB Pritzker 207 State House, Springfield IL 62706 Phone: 217-782-6380 Email: Governor@illinois.gov</p> | <p>US Senator Dick Durbin 711 Hart Senate Bldg., Washington D.C. 20510 1504 3rd Avenue, Suite 227, Rock Island, IL 61201 Phone: 202-224-2152 / 309-786-5173</p> |
| <p>Representative Emanuel Chris Welch (Dist. 7) 300 Capital Building., Springfield, IL 62706 10055 W. Roosevelt Rd., Suite E, Westchester IL 60154 Phone: 217-782-5350 / 708-450-1000 Email: repwelch@emanuelchriswelch.com</p> | <p>US Senator Tammy Duckworth 104 Cannon House Bldg., Washington DC 20515 1701 E. Woodfield Rd., Ste. 704, Schaumburg, IL 60173 Phone: 202-225-3711 / 847-413-1957</p> |
| <p>State Senator Neil Anderson (Dist. 47) 208 Capital Building, Springfield, IL 62706 103 College Avenue, #201, Aledo, IL 61231 Phone: 217-782-5957 / 309-230-7584 Email: Senatorneilanderson@gmail.com</p> | <p>US Representative Eric Sorensen (Dist. 17) 1205 Longworth House Bldg., Washington DC 20515 2401 4th Avenue, Rock Island IL 61201 Phone: 202-225-5905 / 309-786-3406</p> |
| <p>State Senator Mike Halpin (Dist. 36) Sect. C - Office J, Stratton Bldg., Springfield, IL 62706 1504 3rd Avenue, Rock Island, IL 61201 Phone: 217-782-4307 / 309-558-3612 Email: senatormikehalpin@gmail.com</p> | <p>State Representative Gregg Johnson (Dist. 72) 258-W Stratton Bldg., Springfield, IL 62706 Phone: 217-782-5970 / Email: support@repgreggjohnson.com</p> |
| <p>State Representative Daniel Swanson (Dist. 74) 200-3N Stratton Office Bldg., Springfield, IL 62706 275 N. Division St., Box 173, Woodhull, IL 61490 Phone: 217-782-8032 / 309-344-7474 Email: swanson@ilhousegop.org</p> | <p>State Representative Norine Hammond (Dist. 94) 314 Capitol Building., Springfield, IL 62706 331. N. Lafayette St., Box 170, Macomb, IL 61455 Phone: 217-782-0416 / 309-836-2707 Email: rephammond@macomb.com</p> |



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Wise Owl News

Blackhawk IRTA Unit 21, Volume MMXXII, Issue No. 59

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Scott Turnipseed & Joe Vermeire

Send your comments or notify us of any name, address or email changes to:

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Thank you

Printing made possible by an agreement with Tammy Muerhoff at the Regional Office of Education