

Annual Meeting Overview: California State Retirees Fight for Us

By Harry Culotta

At the annual meeting on May 10, 2023, those in attendance learned about a statewide organization many did not know existed, but for which all VCCCD retirees are eligible to join, either as retired members or as associate members.

Mr. Tim Behrens, former statewide president of California State Retirees (CSR) gave the keynote presentation on the background, history, and accomplishments of one of the oldest statewide retirement organizations.

CSR was founded in 1931 as a unit of the California State Employees Association (CSEA). In 1932, what later became CalPERS was established as the State Employees Retirement System (SERS).

According to Mr. Behrens, CSR's top priority, from the very beginning, has been to protect the pensions and health care benefits that CalPERS retirees enjoy. CSR officers attend all meetings of the CalPERS Board of Administration and its committees. CSR also regularly consults with CalPERS officials to assure that retirees' concerns are addressed fairly. CSR advocates for (or against) statewide legislation and/or initiatives that affect the economic security of retirees. The CSR website is www.calretirees.org. CSR publishes a monthly newsletter that is available online for free. Locally, CSR Chapter 31 includes Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties, and its president is Raylene Laverentz.

Specific examples of successful CSR advocacy include:

- In 1962, CSR supported legislation that became the Public Employees Medical and Hospital Care Act (PEMHCA), which covers state, county, and local employees who are enrolled in CalPERS health benefits plans.
- In 1977, CSR supported SB 839 (Dills) that extended collective bargaining rights to state, county, and local public employees.
- In 1992, CSR supported Proposition 162 (the Pension Protection Act) that prevented the Governor and Legislature from raiding CalPERS funds to balance the state budget (as they had done the year before).
- In 1999, CSR supported SB 400 (Ortiz) that greatly enhanced pensions for CalPERS members.
- In 2006, CSR supported AB 2242 (Torrico) that established a vision care benefit for CalPERS retirees.

Following his presentation, Mr. Behrens answered a number of questions from VCCCDRA members. Those in attendance appreciated the extensive information he provided and gave him a round of applause.

Association business

After President Susan Bricker called the business portion of the meeting to order, those in attendance voted to approve the amended minutes, prepared by Secretary Marie Soo Hoo, for the 2022 Annual Meeting. They also accepted the treasurer's report prepared by Treasurer David Magallanes.

Diane Moore, Acting Chair of the Nominating Committee, submitted the name of Kathy Scott in nomination to be Vice President of the Association for the period July 1, 2023, through June 30, 2025. Since there were no other nominations, those in attendance voted unanimously to elect Kathy Scott as Vice President.

President Susan Bricker then introduced the members of the Executive Board, each of whom described their service to Ventura County Community College District and their roles and activities as members of the Executive Board.

Following a brief discussion of members' general concerns in the question-and-answer period, President Susan Bricker then adjourned the 2023 meeting of the VCCCD Retirees Association.

Five Minutes a Week Could Mean Money in the Bank

By Diane Moore and Judith Gerhart

Congratulations! Just by being a member of our retirement organization, you have been a powerful advocate for yourself and your colleagues. Over the years, together, we have fought battles to safeguard our right to the insurance benefits we were promised by the District when we became new employees.

But our VCCCDRA Board believes we can do more. It has set a goal for the next year to use the heft of our members to begin advocating for all of us, not only with District, but also at the State and Federal level. As a starting point, the Board's new Advocacy Task Force has found a simple way for members to help.

You can begin right now! All it takes whenever you have a spare 5 minutes in any week, is to read a brief description of pending legislation that affects education and forward an Email, written by the California Retired Teachers' Association, to make your State and/or Federal legislators aware of that legislation's impact on retired educators.

This Email advocacy program was established several years ago by the California Retired Teachers' Association (CalRTA). As you will recall from our speaker, Greg Barker, at our last annual meeting, their advocacy has resulted in many pieces of landmark legislation resulting in improved benefits, such as providing STRS cost-of-living increases to educators every September. CalRTA also works closely with the California State Retirees Association (CSRA) to encourage PERS to better meet the needs of our classified members.

So, as a first step, our Board has decided to augment CalRTA's Email advocacy program by asking our members who want to help, to contact Diane Moore at utsmoore@yahoo.com or Judith Gerhart at jg@judithgerhart.com. They will contact you, explain the simple process, set you up and be available to answer questions.

P. S. The task force is actively recruiting members! Want to lend a hand?

Computer Sciences Scholarship

By Carolyn Dorrance

Once again VCCCDRA will offer a scholarship through the Ventura County Community Foundation (VCCF). Over a million and a half dollars in financial support was given this past year by this Foundation. The scholarship given by VCCCDRA is for \$1,100 and designated for applicants pursuing some type of computer studies. They must be enrolled or intending to enroll in one of the Ventura County Community Colleges. Their goal may be to major, transfer, have an area of study or earn a certificate in some aspect of computer studies. Our scholarship is given in gratitude for the leadership of Don B. Medley, the founder of this retirement association and a long-time faculty member and manager at VCCCD.

Donations to our scholarship fund are welcome. More information can be found on the Foundation's web site: <https://vccf.org/scholarships/>. Contact Carolyn Dorrance at Cohassetcd@aol.com for more inquiry.

How I Wrote a Book...

Submitted By Judy Garey

When I retired from VC, aside from finally enjoying some leisure time, I renewed my association with the South Coast Writing Project at UCSB. The Writing Project is part of the California Subject Matter Project, an affiliate of the national organization providing discipline-based learning networks and professional development for a variety of educational fields. In the Writing Project we had to well...write, and never considering myself a writer, I had no idea what to compose. Everyone else seemed to have an overabundance of emotional stories; I was stumped.

As I sat there wishing I could read a good book rather than having to write something, I reflected on my language arts colleagues' comments about reading: that many of their students could read, but often lacked an understanding of what they read. How, these teachers wondered, could they improve their students' reading comprehension? And this conundrum sparked an idea for me: could language arts students learn from the way theater students read?

As a stage director, I have always known how much theater students learn about a piece of literature when they participate in creating a stage production of it because the rehearsal process involves a variety of strategies that unpack the meaning of text. They do not "study" the text as they would in an English class, but through participation in the rehearsal process, their comprehension is substantial. How is this possible? What do theater students do in the rehearsal process to illuminate the text? And thus, I found something to write about and the seed of a book: defining and simplifying the rehearsal strategies of actors, designers, and directors into a reading approach to facilitate comprehension for all students.

Now getting an academic book published is no easy task, involving, among other tasks, finding a publisher even interested in your work, a proposal process including why you are qualified to write about this topic and how your book will differ from others already published in the field. Also needed are an annotated table of contents, sample chapters, peer review, changes, modifications, and rewrites, second peer review, more rewrites, extensive work with a copy editor for syntax and grammar, integrating graphics, and a variety of additional tasks too numerous to mention.

But finally, it came together as *Theater, Drama, and Reading: Transforming the Rehearsal Process into a Reading Process*, published by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), December.

Text on the back of the book will tell you:

In the same way that theater artists engage in a rehearsal process to transform printed words into a world of people, space, sound, and action for the stage, readers can learn a modified version of this process to make text visible and concrete, unlocking its meaning. Drawing on both the production aspects of theater and the generative learning elements of drama, Theater, Drama, and Reading shows readers how to transform text from print to interaction, establishing a simple framework for how to read as an actor who builds characters' lives, a set designer who constructs context, and a director who generates action.

The book is available through both NCTE Publications and Amazon. Check it out, and if you would like more information, I would love to hear from you! It has been a pleasure to have the time in my retirement years to continue the work I started at VC: connecting the wonderful world of theater to the subject matter of other disciplines. . Contact at: jfgsb@cox.net

Guest author Judy Garey, retired faculty Ventura College Theater Arts 19991-2013

Retirees and the Loss of Identity

Submitted By David Magallanes

We all remember the months—possibly years—of excitement and anticipation as our retirement date approached. Visions of travel, hobbies, well-deserved relaxation, and the completion of unfinished business all danced in our heads.

We knew that as retirees of the VCCCD, we would be relatively secure. Certainly, we expected to dock at a safe harbor when compared to so many other Americans who face anxiety and financial stress, if not despair, at the end of the long road to retirement.

One thing that we may not have prepared for is the sudden, unsettling, and sometimes shocking loss of “identity.” That loss can, potentially, feel like running into an emotional brick wall that we did not see in front of us as we approached the end of our careers in the college system.

Loss of identity can be exhilarating for some and devastating for others. We might enter dangerous territory, convincing ourselves that we are “useless.” We may feel that we have completely lost our compass. At the very least, many of us can expect to struggle with this loss of workplace status and possibly even enter a period of grief.

Some retirees may not experience so much a “loss” as a tectonic shifting of the earth on which they’ve been standing. In any case, the transition through retirement, from our work life to our “civilian” life, can be jarring. As an [article in a Forbes newsletter](#) elucidates, for the sake of our emotional health, we need to expect to pass through a period of mourning as we process our loss or sudden change in status.

The “loss” is multifaceted. We experience a loss of camaraderie, missing profoundly the loss of banter and bonhomie. We lose our routine, our sense of accomplishment and fulfillment. In a very real psychological sense, we may feel as if we lose our very selves—at least for a period of time. It becomes important to nurse ourselves through this metamorphosis lest we fall victim to feelings of sadness and possibly even depression, in spite of our sudden freedom to “do all we ever wanted to do.”

Indeed, we may no longer be able to do all we ever wanted to do. By the time we reach retirement age, it is entirely possible that age-related changes have taken place. Physical and mental ailments may have crept in. These ultimately inevitable, insidious developments, whether subtle or obvious, may limit our ability to enjoy the new opportunities offered by retirement.

Especially if we’ve been intensely busy up to the time of retirement, we may suddenly find ourselves with vast amounts of time that we never had before as an adult. We may flounder for a time until we “figure out” how we wish to live out the remainder of our lives. This is normal and healthy.

As we sauntered down the hallway at our job site for the last time, we reflected on the impact that we made in the world. We knew that our work transformed lives, particularly in historically underserved communities, and will reverberate for generations. For many of us, leaving our office and turning in the keys felt like a sort of transition to the “other side.” It was, in fact, a demise of sorts, where we left behind our workplace, family and friendships that will never quite be the same again.

Saying goodbye is painful. There is no “workplace hospice care” to prepare us for this “demise.” We simply do the best we can after retirement, often struggling with our emotions that vary between waves of grief, episodes of self-doubt, and the ecstasy of having so much pressure and responsibility lifted from our shoulders.

Upon retirement, we might well be asked (at a party, for example), “So what do you do (for a living)?” It used to feel satisfying and prestigious to be able to say, “I do _____ at a college,” or “I teach _____ at a college,” or “I work in the _____ office at a college” (fill in the blanks). Now, when we say that we are “retired,” we might feel a pang of angst, or even a puzzling sense of embarrassment. It’s almost like saying, “Oh, I don’t do anything important anymore.” We might answer with a description of what we *used* to do to convince them, and ourselves, that we once made a difference. Once upon a time, we contributed to society. [See **Magallanes**, page 5]]

Retirees and the Loss of Identity [Magallanes from Page4]

When I used to go into a grocery store or a retail shop after work in my coat and tie, I exuded confidence because I felt that I had a place in the world. Because of the way I was dressed, I commanded respect without even trying.

Now I walk into those same stores in my street clothes and I'm just "another Joe." And I feel as if I'm treated accordingly. That's when it hits home: I've lost my work-related identity. I retrieve it briefly when one of the thousands of my former students recognizes me as I'm out and about and greets me with a joyous, "Hi, professor!"

It may seem that no one ever warned us about the need to emotionally survive the disconcerting transition through the retirement tunnel. So, what can we do to assuage the anxiety or even pain that the transition might inflict upon our psyche?

There is an article on the AARP website that addresses this issue: "[Are You Afraid To Retire?](#)" The featured image that used to be at the top of the article (it no longer is) said it all. A man in a suit, carrying a briefcase, stands on a concrete pillar, about to take a leap into the great unknown lying below. The best description of the look on his face is "resolute terror." This article discusses the angst that many retirees feel as they approach retirement, take the leap, and then deal with the aftermath of their decision to retire.

The article also introduces a couple of books about retirement, the loss of relevance, and the "unnerving transition" into life on the other side of work. For anyone *about* to retire, either a "[life transition counselor](#)" or the books mentioned in the article might be extremely helpful. This same advice applies to those who find themselves struggling with the roiling psychological waters that often accompany the transition through retirement.

We all handle retirement differently depending on our personal circumstances, our personalities, and our finances. I know a faculty retiree who seriously considered the possibility of training to become a truck driver. He had read articles about retired lawyers and doctors who had decided to do something "very different" in their retirement. Their trucking income was simply "extra cash" and not the desperately needed salaries that their younger trucking colleagues depended upon to survive this brutal economy. It sounded like a glamorous life until he read some of the other blog articles about the rigors, challenges, disappointments, frustrations, and outright dangers of the trucking life.

Another retiree who lives alone considered working at a local Home Depot just to have company throughout the day—an attempt to recreate some of the camaraderie that he so desperately missed. The income would have been considered great "petty cash" to either bulk up his retirement savings or to thoroughly enjoy his time off without worrying about "spending too much."

Some retirees I know join groups that engage in some form of physical exercise. That might be yoga, or walking, or hiking, or cycling.

Some take dance classes that teach them a valuable social skill for which they may well not have had time while they had their noses to the grindstone. Locally, there are dance classes in Latin, ballroom, tango, and swing, for example. I have known countless retirees for whom the dance scene reduced their sense of workplace loss as they created a healthy new life for themselves on the dance floor.

Volunteer work can soften the blow to the loss of workplace identity by providing an outlet for a retiree's talents and experience.

Some retirees may discover during their transition out of a career that they want to return to college—but this time as a *student*. They may wish to pursue interests into which they previously did not have the time to immerse themselves. They may even feel that they still have the youth, time, and stamina to launch themselves into an entirely different career.

Another way that some retirees reclaim a sense of workplace identity is to establish an online business of one kind or another. They can often build on the expertise they cultivated in their previous life and offer professional and/or practical services online. [See **Magallanes** Page 6]

Retirees and the Loss of Identity [Magallanes from Page5]

It is crucial that new retirees find ways to value themselves as they begin their transition to the retirement “afterlife”—after decades of work into an existence in practically another dimension, for which they may or may not have prepared ideally.

We’ve all heard too many stories about people (especially men) who retire, lose their sense of identity, and become sick...or worse. Adjusting to retirement is serious business. Even if professional help is required, we all need to find ways to continue feeling as if we are still relevant, useful, and valued.

Then we’ll enjoy even more our new freedoms and opportunities as we find purpose in the last third of our lives.

Guest author David Magallanes is VCCCDRA Treasurer and Retired Mathematics instructor from Oxnard College.

2023 ANNUAL FALL SOCIAL EVENT BARBECUE - ECT Building - Ventura College

Talking about having been through the mill, I bet many of us can say we sure feel like we have. Fire, floods, pandemic, and most of us are still here to talk about it. So, we are hoping that you will want to do just that and join in the fun of our first in-person gathering in four years! The VC Foundation has offered to sponsor our event this year and the location will be on the Ventura College campus. There will be plenty of free parking in the “E” parking lot, which is located on the East side of campus, near the Wright Event Center and the VC Foundation Office located at 71 Day Road. Look for the signs with balloons posted at the driveway entrance to the parking lot. For those with limited mobility, there will be shuttles provided by the VC Foundation. Tables, chairs, and canopy covers will be provided for shade and comfort for those nice long conversations to catch up with former colleagues and old friends! Our favorite chef, former colleague and good friend, Lester Tong, will be delighting us with his culinary skills once again. We look forward to seeing many of you there!

Date: Monday, October 2, 2023

Place: Ventura College – ECT Bldg.

Time: 12:00 p.m.—3:00 p.m.

Social Hour: 12 pm - 1 pm (Beverages/Appetizers).

Food service: 1 pm

Menu: Tri-tip, chicken, salads, chili beans, bread, appetizers, and desserts.

Vegetarian Menu items: veggie-burgers, chili beans, grilled portobello mushrooms, sweet peppers, sweet onions, pineapples, zucchini, rice pilaf and garlic bread.

Water & soft drinks provided. Beer & wine available for purchase. (This is also our fundraiser for the year folks!)

Cost: \$20 per person (the completed reservation form that you will find in this newsletter, should be cut off and submitted along with your **check payable to VCCCDRA** by the **deadline date of September 22, 2023**). Reservation form and check should be mailed to the **VCCCD Retirees’ Association, PO Box 6216 ,Ventura, CA 93006-6216.**

We look forward to having you join in the fun, and enjoying an afternoon of good food, 50/50 raffle & prizes, camaraderie and for sure plenty of laughs with former colleagues and friends! Hope to see you there! **(If you are interested in donating items for the raffle, contact Becky Hull (bhullandus8@gmail.com) or Marie Soo Hoo (masoohoo@twc.com)).** The location of the event is indicated by the “black star” near the “ECT” building on the map. The designated parking lot is also indicated.



Presidents Report

By Susan Bricker

Dear Colleagues,

It has been a long, long time since we were last able to greet one another, catch up on what is going on in our lives and just enjoy each other's company, but finally the time has come. We are so pleased to announce our Fall 2023 Social Event will be held on October 2nd! The gathering will be in the Agriculture area on the Ventura College campus from 12:00 pm to 3:00 pm. There will be good food, drink and fun! You will find Marie SooHoo's article about the Fall Social and an RSVP form on page 6 in this newsletter. Please RSVP and hope to see you there!

Unfortunately, one of the main topics of conversation at the Fall event will undoubtedly be the potential changes to our health benefits. By the time this newsletter reaches you the District will have made a decision about changing health care providers from CalPERS to SISC (Self-Insured Schools of California). SISC is identified as a joint powers authority that offers and administers a variety of insurance and financial products to a pool of public school and college districts. They have been around since 1978 and are already involved with the District in that they play a role in administering our Delta Dental plan. Please understand that I say "unfortunately" not because our benefits will suffer from that transition, since as of this writing at the end of August we are just beginning to learn the specifics about the plans that will be offered to retirees. There will undoubtedly be pros and cons for us and for active employees. I say "unfortunately" because once again our District has chosen to make things difficult by adopting the shortest timeline possible for employees and retirees to weigh in on such a critical decision. As of this writing in August they have just begun negotiations AFT and SEIU, giving them less than a month to inform their members and engage in a meaningful dialogue about the quality of benefits being offered. Retirees were afforded one information session, a ZOOM meeting that occurred on Tuesday, August 29. It was hosted by Maggie Lepore from Burnham, two SISC representatives and Katy Lyon from the District Office. Our members that attended were well prepared and asked excellent questions, some of which the panel of presenters could not answer on the spot. We received a promise that they would follow up with us on these questions, and if they did so we will have already passed those answers on to you. I cannot give enough thanks to Marta Freixas who took it upon herself to analyze and compare the SISC benefits to those currently provided by CalPERS to help the Executive Board understand some of the pluses and minuses of the plan..

At the time of this writing, we do know that a decision will be made by September 15 as noted above. IF the decision is to go with SISC, and that seems highly likely, the open enrollment period with SISC will be in October and their coverage will take effect on January 1, 2024. We also know that all retirees age 65 or over will be required to enroll in Medicare Parts A and B, and a process will be provided for that transition. We have been promised "many more" Q&A sessions by Burnham to help with the transition. I am hopeful that we will have been able to provide you all with much more information before the time this newsletter is published!

One of our biggest concerns with situations like this is the District's insistence, and honestly our own reliance, on handling all communications via email. We know that we have nearly 200 members in VCCCDRA who do not have or provide us with email addresses, and we have advised the District. We make an effort to make sure critical information reaches them by regular mail, but I will admit that it is a challenge to coordinate the mailings. Please consider sharing your email address with the VCCCDRA and the District if you have one! I promise that the volume of communications is extremely low, neither we nor the District will flood your inbox! But having your email address will help us help you by getting critical information to you in a timely manner.

Looking forward to seeing many of you on October 2 at the Fall Social Event!

Membership Report

BY JOY KOBAYASHI

Please join me in welcoming our valued colleagues to the VCCCD Retirees Association and in wishing them a long and satisfying retirement.

Robert Moskowitz	VC	Karyl Osher	VC	Eric McDonald	DO
Donna Beatty	VC	Cecilia Milan	OC	Marlene Dean	OC
Patti Blair	DO	Matilde Sanchez	OC	Karen Paxton	OC
Myhahn Ty	OC	Mary Jones	VC	Kathy Duret	MC
Alwin Sauers Jr.	VC	Sarah Downs	VC	Peter Finrock	MC

In Memoriam

We honor the memory of our departed colleagues and extend our sincerest condolences to their families, friends, and associates.

- Victor Fontaine
- Paul Acker
- Edith Stone
- Moretta Nelson
- Carmen Llanes

STAY INFORMED! SEND US YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS!

Dear VCCCD Retirees,

I am still trying to collect email addresses for all members of the Association. If you are receiving a printed copy of this newsletter, this means that we don't have your email address. In addition to helping us save money on newsletter costs, giving us your email address will enable you to stay current on various items of interest to members. The Retiree Association often sends out special alerts concerning district benefit news which pertain to retirees via email that often do not get into our newsletter.

Please send your email address to me at: tandemstoker@roadrunner.com. Thank you.

VCCCD Retirees' Association
P.O. Box 6216
Ventura, CA 93006-6216

Place
Postage
Here

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

The Monitor

Summer 2023

Ventura County Community College District Retirees' Association
2023-2024 Executive Board

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Vacant, Vice President

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