

## **The Desert Sun**

November 2, 2009

### **Retired teachers make a mark in the community**

*Helen Smith, for The Desert Sun*

This is the 11th annual California Retired Teachers Week. It is time to recognize the volunteer service teachers provide in our community.

Members in one local organization, California Retired Teachers Association Desert Roadrunner Division, logged more than 39,000 hours of volunteer service last year.

Anywhere you go in the Coachella Valley, you are likely to find retired teacher volunteers. They distribute food, drive seniors to appointments, work at hospitals, usher at theaters and tutor in schools. Retired teachers work as docents at museums, participate in service organizations, help in churches, and serve on civic boards, all with no financial compensation.

Here are only three examples of how California Retired Teachers Association Desert Roadrunner unpaid volunteers contribute to the community:

#### **Helping the USO**

When the USO (United Services Organization) Palm Springs Center opened, David Lutes was appointed public relations coordinator. He played Santa for 600 children at the Twenty-nine Palms Marine Base, drove items from the desert to the base thrift store and organized volunteers for parades and Marine band concerts.

He dressed as Uncle Sam in last year's Palm Desert Greens Christmas Golf Cart Parade. He has logged more than 1,000 volunteer hours with the USO and he continues to volunteer there weekly.

#### **Young at art**

Almost 20 years ago, California Retired Teachers Association Desert Roadrunner members Myra Byrd, Betty Morgin and Mary Shmorhun began to coordinate the Young at Art summer program at the Coachella Valley Museum and Cultural Center in Indio. Nearly two decades later, Myra and Betty are still at it, with the help of Mary Minamide. This year's program featured four one-week class sessions in either clay or drawing and other media. Students attended two-hour classes Monday through Friday.

More than 100 children, 8 to 12 years old, participated. The program ended with a two-hour artists' reception and show of selected student work on July 12.

## **Reading Day**

This is the third year that California Retired Teachers Association Desert Roadrunner member Debbie Knight has coordinated Reading Day at the Indio Fashion Mall. This one-day activity was initiated in 1993 by Delta Mu chapter of the education society Delta Kappa Gamma International. Kindergarten through third-grade students in valley schools were invited to listen to community leaders read books at the Indio Fashion Mall on Saturday, April 4. Children who listened to a single reader received a free book, a free balloon and ice cream.

About 250 children participated in this event, along with Desert Roadrunner members Janet Benavidez, Ann Copeland, Joan Linn, Pat Mauritzen, Mary Minamide, Betty Morgin, Judy Petersen, Kathleen Ross and Helen Smith.

The California Retired Teachers Association is the state's first and foremost organization completely dedicated to the concerns of retired public school educators. Founded in 1929, the organization now has more than 52,000 members in 89 local chapters, called divisions, throughout the state. Last year, members reported donating nearly 2.7 million hours of volunteer service to the community.

The Desert Roadrunner Division, established in 1992, now has 327 members. Membership is open to any educator, active or retired, and to any person who agrees to support the purposes of the California Retired Teachers Association.

Those interested in joining can contact the author, Helen Smith.

Helen Smith is communication chairwoman for the California Retired Teachers Association Desert Roadrunner Division. She taught at Palm View Elementary School in Coachella for 28 years. E-mail her at [hindiosmith@gmail.com](mailto:hindiosmith@gmail.com).

## **Union Democrat**

Letters to the editor for Oct. 23, 2009

### **Modest income**

To the editor:

The topic of public pensions seems interwoven into most newspapers these days.

As a retired teacher, the educator in me feels the need to set the record straight on a few key points. Many people seem to think that teachers receive pensions as a free benefit when, in fact, they pay into their own retirement account. The average retired teacher paid into his or her retirement for more than 26 years and receives an average of \$2,700 per month in benefits.

Unlike corporate workers, teachers are required to contribute to their pensions; most paid 8 percent into the California State Teachers' Retirement System (CalSTRS), which is higher than the rate private industry workers pay for Social Security.

In general, teachers aren't eligible for Social Security so their CalSTRS pension is their only guaranteed income in retirement. Just as private-sector retirees rely on Social Security, retired

teachers rely on CalSTRS. Teachers made contributions in good faith, were promised a pension in return and should be able to depend on this modest retirement income.

Retired educators in Tuolumne, Amador and Calaveras counties have contributed more than 30,000 hours of volunteer work in their communities. Retirement for educators now means service.

Lenore Shively, president  
California Retired  
Teachers Association  
Mother Lode, Division 87  
Sonora

### **The Times-Standard**

#### **Answering the call**

Kay Escarda/For the Times-Standard  
11/03/2009

As the saying goes, “If you want to get something done, ask a busy person to do it.” To be sure, there are a whole lot of retired teachers out there getting important work done in our community. The following are just a few of them.

One very busy volunteer is Carol Kinser of Fortuna. Kinser is president of the board and serves as the director of Fortuna Senior Services. Fortuna has no senior center, so the organization rents space at a couple of churches where daily activities are offered. Seniors enjoy exercise classes, card games, a book club and educational programs at monthly meetings. They also organize hiking and mini-trips around Humboldt County to get seniors out and active.

Fortuna Senior Services claims about 300 members and all activities are delivered by volunteers. When asked how she got that volunteer “job,” Kinser answered, “Well, somebody had to do it.” (See the daily list of activities in the Calendar of Events on page B2 of each week's “Boomers and Beyond” section.)

That attitude apparently is shared by many members of the California Retired Teachers Association (CalRTA), Division No. 27, which encompasses Humboldt and Del Norte counties. Last year, 30,010 volunteer hours valued at \$607,702 were donated to our local community. As budgets were cut, but demand for services increased, retired teachers across California stepped up their participation. CalRTA members logged 2.7 million hours for a value of \$54 million in services to California.

This week, Nov. 1 to 7, has been designated as the “Week of the Retired Teacher” in recognition of their contribution to society. The range of interests and activities “is all over the map.”

Retirees serve on boards, as docents in the arts and at parks, and in hospitals and health-related organizations. They donate time to food programs, work directly with students, volunteer in literacy programs and keep libraries going. The list is as varied as the individuals who give of their time.

Another such individual is Faith Crist of Crescent City. President of the Woman's Club the last two years, Crist says the money they raised last year was donated to the Humane Society. Fundraising proceeds will go to a veteran's organization and scholarships this year. She also enjoys volunteering at the county fair, taking in and helping set up exhibits each year.

Many teachers can't get too far away from school even after they retire. Crist is no exception. A former math teacher, she volunteers in her daughter's class to help students get a good foundation in that important skill. She also helps her daughter by correcting papers at home. She lives about 13 miles out of town but regularly travels back and forth to teach Sunday school at her church.

Crist served 12 years on the local school board, which is always a heavy commitment of time and energy. Each year CalRTA gives several scholarships to Humboldt and Del Norte graduates and regularly includes students attending the College of the Redwoods campus in Crescent City. Crist reached out to other Del Norte retirees in a successful campaign to support that effort. When she left the school board, she personally delivered CalRTA pens and balloons to each school in the district to give the teachers a well-deserved "thank you."

Kinser also keeps her ties with education. She is a past president and current board member of the Humboldt State University Alumni Association and serves on the Humboldt County Committee on School Organization. She is the vice president of Friends of the Fortuna Library. Volunteers sponsor Library Day and Kinser takes the lead on a fundraising dinner each year. She also leads two interest groups for American Association of University Women.

In addition, Kinser co-chairs a luncheon committee, and is a former president, vice president and department chair of the annual Humboldt Sponsors rummage sale. This annual sale raises funds to benefit local children.

Kinser also frequently chairs Redwood Empire Golf Club luncheons and when asked how she happened to organize the anniversary dinner for the Senior Friendship Circle in Eureka recently, she replied, "Oh, I've just always done it." When next asked how she came to be the director of the adult choir at the Fortuna Methodist Church, since she wasn't a music teacher, her answer was that they always had music around her house and "somebody had to do it."

When you want something done, ask a busy person, indeed!

Some retired teachers rack up an incredible number of hours focused mainly on one special interest. A good example of that kind of dedication is Mike Kellogg, retired social science teacher at Eureka High School. A man of many talents, he has given most of his 1,150 reported volunteer hours this past year for the Timber Heritage Association.

Kellogg serves as the treasurer on the board of directors and is the editor of an extensive and informative newsletter, "The Whistle Punk." Many hours are spent on work parties restoring the

1893 Samoa Shops building, moving artifacts, representing the association at display opportunities, attending meetings and working on fundraisers.

He is often seen at the Fort Humboldt "Steam-ups" during the summer, where logging equipment is displayed and young and old alike enjoy short rides on the flatcar behind the wood-fired steam locomotive. He hosted a tour of the association's roundhouse in Samoa last summer, giving historical background on the huge locomotives recently moved there for continued restoration.

When not volunteering for that organization, Kellogg finds time to be the treasurer for his church and has been the auditor for the local division of the California Retired Teachers Association.

One of the questions retirees are asked on their report form is if they have contributed more than 4,000 volunteer hours in their lifetime. This recognition was started by President George H.W. Bush as part of his "Points of Light Campaign." Bush recently invited President Obama to join him in recognizing the importance of volunteerism in America.

Some of the CalRTA members who have compiled that many hours over the years include former teachers and colleagues Judy Billingsley, Diana Berliner, Marian Christiansen, Kay Escarda, Ellie Gainer, Billie Hall, Marlene Hover, Lynn McKenna, Doris and Doug Nitsch, Larry Olson, Don and Nancy Quintrell and Jean Vaughn.

It seems these busy retired teachers, as well as many others, have certainly answered that call to get something done. During this Week of the Retired Teacher, if you see a retiree volunteering in our communities, let them know you appreciate their efforts. They will keep on anyway, but it would be nice to hear.

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Kay Escarda is a resident of Eureka who taught in several Northern California schools. She is an active member of California Retired Teachers Association at both the local and state level.

## **Lake County Record - Bee**

### **Celebrating retired teachers**

11/03/2009

By Lloyd Gillespie

Nov. 1-7 will be the 11th annual California Retired Teachers Week. As California and Lake County retired educators continue to be involved in their community and volunteer their services in the classrooms, there is a misperception in regard to public pensions.

As a retired teacher, the "educator" in me feels the need to set the record straight on a few key points regarding this misperception. Many people seem to think that teachers receive their pensions as a free benefit, when in fact, they paid into their own retirement accounts.

Teachers were and are required to pay into CalSTRS (teachers pension fund) 8 percent of their monthly salary, which is higher than workers pay for Social Security. In general, teachers are not eligible for Social Security benefits, so their CalSTRS pension is their only guaranteed income in retirement. Those who do receive Social Security benefits have earned them by working additional jobs to support the needs of their families. However, those benefits are reduced or eliminated by onerous and unfair penalties called Windfall Elimination Provision, initiated by our government.

The fewer than 26 percent of our retirees who receive health benefits get them not from the state but from the school district they bargained with for them. Most retired teachers continue to use their former school district's health plans, but must pay for them.

The average retired teacher paid into his/her retirement for 26 or more years and receives only \$2,700 per month; many receive less than this. We did not enter this profession to get rich. We made contributions in good faith which CalSTRS invested wisely.

We earned and were promised a pension from STRA and Social Security and should be able to depend on this modest retirement income.

Lloyd Gillespie

Kelseyville

### **Contra Costa Times**

11-4-09

WEST COUNTY NOTES: Saturday is the final day of California Retired Teachers Week. Members of West Contra Costa Division 58 of the California Retired Teachers Association reported 42,181 hours of volunteer service. The chapter and association also fund grants and scholarships for students.