



Pima County School Retirees' Association

December, 2019

We welcome all retired school employees



PCSRA POEpourri

~ Steve Poe



Another year is passing and we will soon be facing 2020 head-on. Time has gone by so quickly since the turn of the century, but here we are! Reflecting on our blessings and challenges at the end of the year always seems to be a good way to review what has taken place and prepare for what is to come.

We can start with the blessings we have in our Arizona State Retirement System (ASRA) defined benefit pension. We do not have to worry whether that deposit is going to be delivered into our accounts each month. The ASRS remains one of the best run retirement plans in the USA. Recent news reports have shown the PSPRS (Public Safety retirement) system has some major obstacles to overcome, with management of costs a major concern. Not so with our ASRS pension system. However, we need to be constantly diligent of the many politicians and organizations (mostly affiliated with extreme political groups or money management concerns) who want THEIR chance at a cut of our pension reserves. There WILL soon be new legislation to “monkey” with our ASRS, so stay tuned.

The blessings of PCSRA membership include you and hundreds just like you throughout Arizona. Here in Pima County, we have you to thank for the scholarship money we provide yearly to help prospective teachers at the UA College of Education. Our continued support to Youth on Their Own (homeless teens) and the Southern Arizona Food Bank is only possible with your generosity. Just after this holiday season, we will again be collecting for the Sister Jose Women’s Center to help displaced women and children through the rough months of winter. All these activities contribute to making the Tucson area a more caring place to live.

The challenges are oft times more personal, with changes to our health, family situations, our personal finances, etc. Our state organization, AASRA, has a fund to help our members in a financial jam. The Lois Snyder Fund is available for an economic “shot in the arm” when real need arises. Please contact me if you would like an application for these grants or loans, OR if you know of an AASRA member who could use some assistance.

Our collective challenges are usually related to the happenings at the Arizona State Legislature during the 4-6 month session that begins each January. We always wonder whether the legislators will try to make changes to the ASRS that will affect our stable pensions. Rest assured that your local and statewide officers will do their best to keep you informed of potential changes throughout the legislative season.

Holiday blessings to you and all of yours...

Steve Poe, PCSRA President



November Report

PCSRA Membership is currently 184.

AASRA (state) membership is 112.

Scholarship Fund: \$305

Scholarship Goal: \$2,000

January 9th Luncheon at Viscount Suites

\$18.00 each Postmark by Jan. 1 to:
PCSRA Reservations, 417 N. Maguire Ave, 85710.

A) Southwest Wrap with Pub Chips OR

B) Chicken Caesar Salad

Vegetarian: Caesar without chicken)

Name _____

Guest _____

Tis the Season for Giving

By Barbara Macpherson



Programs

~ Barbara Macpherson



Our guest speaker in January will be Maria Ramirez-Trillo from Tucson AARP (American Association of Retired Persons). She will be talking about the legislation supported by AARP, such as lowering prescription drug prices, the passage of the **Older Americans Act**, (see article below). Other topics include caregiving, elder abuse, senior scams, and dealing with social isolation.

The PCSRA Board is asking members to bring warm clothing, personal grooming items, sleeping bags, and back packs for the homeless women of **Sister Jose Women's Center** in Tucson, for the January 9 meeting. We are also hoping that you will contribute your State Tax Credit to the **Rincon University Choir**, so Director Mareena Boosamra Ball can take 75 students to Carnegie Hall in New York City in March. We are collecting money in our donation cans for the **Community Food Bank** during the December luncheon.

Our guest speaker from November's meeting, Steve Holmes, Superintendent of Sunnyside School District said, "The Sunnyside Unified School District is looking for retired educators to volunteer time in our schools. We are seeking individuals to support classroom teachers with additional help in the classroom, after-school tutors, and individuals who would like to serve as mentors to students. If you are interested please contact Marisela Felix at 520-545-2228. Our students would greatly appreciate your support."

House Votes to Extend Older Americans Act -- A landmark statute that helps millions of older Americans age in their homes with services such as Meals on Wheels, free rides, and support programs for family caregivers has been unanimously approved by the House of Representatives. Now it goes to the Senate. The Older Americans Act, first passed in 1965, would be extended for five years under the House measure, with a 7% increase in funding for its programs in 2020 and a 6% increase for each of the next four years.

The act provides money to states to help about 11 million people 60-plus each year. It would increase the emphasis on services that help older Americans deal with social isolation and strengthen the National Family Caregiver Support Program, which helps provide respite care for caregivers. Call your U.S. Senators, Kyrsten Sinema and Martha McSally, to encourage them to support the Older Americans Act. The more people who call, the more our senators will take notice.

Pick up Your Phone and Be Heard -- There is an easy way to make your voice heard in the U.S. and the State Legislatures. The U.S. and State Capital telephone line is 844-872-0234. Put in your zip code, then 1 for Federal, 2 for State. Press the # sign to get to the next official.

Help Sister Jose Help Others -- Sister Jose's Women Center provides a safe harbor for homeless women to get help and counseling, serving about 100 women in Tucson a day. Their needs are listed below. Please bring your donations to the January Luncheon.

Bus Passes

Warm Coats

New Underwear

Toothpaste/Toothbrushes

Sweatpants

New socks

Disposable Razors

Hand Sanitizer/Wet wipes

Hoodies

Hats & Gloves

Shampoo/Conditioner

Deodorant and Body Wash

Dear Rincon/University H.S. Choir Supporters,

By now, I'm sure you have heard about our wonderful invitation for next Spring 2020 to perform in the world famous, Carnegie Hall, in New York City! https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carnegie_Hall

This year our tour is a little different in that I have been invited to be the guest conductor and we will be performing Schubert's Mass in G! Check out the YouTube of this wonderful work! <https://youtu.be/u5HFosuArRM>

The Rincon/University High School Concert Choir will fly to NYC on Thursday, March 12th, and will return on Tuesday, March 17th. We will perform on Sunday, March 15th at 2:00 p.m. The cost is about \$2500.00 per person, which will include flights, buses, hotel, musical rehearsals, accompanists, and even a couple shows.

It is my hope that EVERYONE will get the opportunity to participate in this once-in-a-lifetime experience. We have 75 students registered to attend. We began fundraising last year for this tour.

Of those 75 students, there are 15 students who are in dire financial straits. I have been sending requests out to my friends and colleagues looking for additional funds. We've raised over \$12,000 of the \$37,500 needed to cover these very deserving students. I hope you will consider sharing your AZ Tax Credit donations this year with these great kids. If you cannot help at this time, please share this information with all your AZ friends and relatives. We would be forever grateful!

You can donate via <https://az-tucson.intouchreceipting.com/>. There is a button that says "To make a tax credit contribution without logging in, "click here". Please make sure to select Rincon/University under School and Choral Tax Credit under Item.

You can write a check to: RUHS Choir (write Carnegie Hall 2020 in the memo.) You can bring or mail it to: Rincon/University HS, 421 N. Arcadia Blvd., Tucson, AZ 85711 attention: Finance Manager/Choir Tour.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you in advance for your support of the Rincon University H.S. Choral Department!

*Sincerely,
Mareena Boosamra Ball
Director, Rincon University H.S. Choir*



Scholarship FUNdraiser a Gas!

Gaslight Theatre is presenting "SHOWDOWN IN TUCSON" on Thurs, Feb. 13 at 7 PM. Please purchase tickets as soon as possible. We want to complete sales by Jan. 15th. Tickets will be sold at the December and January meetings. You can call Judy Hokett 749-4464 or Sue Ellen Coltrin at 624-1831 to buy tickets.

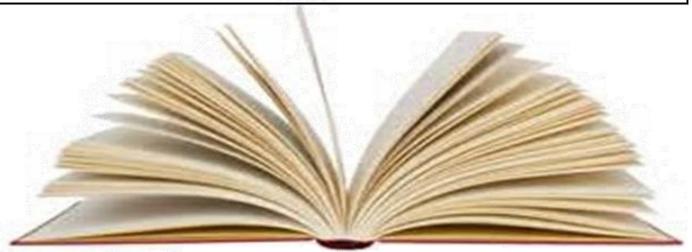
The reason for the fundraiser may be clearer considering this information supplied by the UA for the 2019-2020 school year: Tuition: \$12,400, Books \$800, Supplies and Course fees \$100 for a total of \$13,300. This does not include room and board, transportation, or other miscellaneous expenses. Please assist us in meeting our goal of \$2,000 for this year!!! It's tax deductible!



BE THE ONE WHO MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Time to Submit Volunteer Hours!

Every year, PCSRA sends the number of hours members have spent volunteering to AASRA. This data lets people, especially legislators, know how much of an impact we really have on our communities. Please use your 2019 calendars to record the number of hours you spent helping individuals or organizations since January first. On the back of the sheet, please describe how you spent those volunteer hours. Please mail your form by January 15 to Gail Schuessler at 2025 E. 3rd St., Tucson, AZ 85719-5104.



PCSRA BOOK CLUB

Dear Friends,

We are not meeting until January 23 at 1:00 when we discuss **A Gentleman in Moscow** by Amor Towles.

A Gentleman in Moscow is the utterly entertaining second novel from the author of Rules of Civility. Amor Towles skillfully transports us to The Metropol, the famed Moscow hotel where movie stars and Russian royalty hobnob, where Bolsheviks plot revolutions and intellectuals discuss the merits of contemporary Russian writers, where spies spy, thieves steal, and the danger of twentieth-century Russia lurks outside its marbled walls. It's also where wealthy Count Alexander Rostov lives under house arrest for a poem deemed incendiary by the Bolsheviks, and meets Nina.

Nina is a precocious and wide-eyed young girl who holds the keys to the entire hotel, wonders what it means to be a princess, and will irrevocably change his life. Despite being confined to the hallways of the hotel, the Count lives an absorbing, adventure-filled existence, filled with capers, conspiracies and culture.

Alexander Rostov is a character for the ages--like Kay Thompson's Eloise and Wes Anderson's M. Gustav, he is unflinchingly (and hilariously) devoted to his station, even when forced to wait tables, play hide and seek with a young girl, or confront communism. Towles magnificently conjures the grandeur of the Russian hotel and the vibrancy of the characters that call it home.

--Al Woodworth, *The Amazon Book Review*

Best wishes.

Jim jbm500@cox.net



Charters & Money

Jerry Holmes



Over the last two years **The Arizona Republic** has dedicated significant resources to exploring the financing, politics and performance of charter schools in AZ and other states. **The Republic's** outstanding reporting has garnered the George Polk Award for Journalism in Education.

One needs to be a subscriber in order to access the series online, but in my opinion, it's worth the cost of the subscription to learn more about what **The Republic** calls The Charter Gamble. A one-month subscription allows access to all of the pieces published over the last two years.

The Republic's most recent piece in the series covers the finances of the American Leadership Academy (ALA), a charter school chain in the Phoenix area. With 12 locations in Mesa, Gilbert, San Tan Valley, and Florence, ALA has an annual budget of \$79 million and serves approximately 8,300 students.

Last year the co-owner of ALA, Glenn Way, paid at least \$46.8 million to companies that he or his relatives owned as part of operating costs. Previous reporting by The Republic on ALA real estate activities showed that Mr. Way made a profit of \$37 million by expanding ALA campuses.

Mr. Way is a former Utah lawmaker and failed Utah charter school operator who realized the Arizona's laxer charter regulations would allow him to make more money. Charter schools in Arizona are exempt from the strictly defined practices that public schools must follow regarding financial practices, purchasing, and hiring (nepotism). However, there are rules in place about related party transactions and financial accounting. Arizona charter schools receive a higher per student funding amount than do public schools.

When will they ever learn? And at what cost to this generation of students?



Charter schools must submit an annual independent financial audit to the Charter Board of AZ. The Charter Board says that ALA and their accountant are currently being investigated for alleged financial improprieties. Their records show at least six ongoing investigations on ALA.

When asked by **The Republic**, the head of the Charter Board did not know when investigations would be concluded saying the agency has only ten employees currently and several vacancies. There are 544 charter schools in Arizona serving about 16% of Arizona's students. Ten employees can hardly provide meaningful oversight of all those charter schools.

Just over a year ago, I quoted **The Arizona Republic's** reports on AZ legislator and charter school owner Eddie Farnsworth. He profited between \$12 and \$30 million from financial maneuverings at his charter school.

In that same Oct. '18 issue, I talked about charter school profiteering at Primavera and BASIS Charter Schools. Those articles were also based on information from **The Republic**.

Editorial questions follow:

When will the AZ Legislature stop funneling tax dollars to profit-oriented school operators and make charter schools accountable for justifying expenditures and following codes?

When will the AZ Legislature fund public school teacher salaries in the state at a level close to the national average rather than the current 45th - 49th lowest pay rate in the nation?

When will the voters in Arizona pay attention and hold the Arizona Legislature accountable for their ongoing misappropriations and lax accountability of public funds?

Fillmore to Nix School Programs

Apache Junction Rep. John Fillmore (R) will introduce a bill to the AZ legislature that would prohibit any school district from creating new or continuing existing community school programs.

Community school programs are usually partnerships with non-profit organizations that offer services to families such as clothing banks, car seats, backpacks of food, family counseling, and English language and parenting classes. Many low-income schools use such partnerships because they feel that anything that benefits the family increases student success.

Arguing in the last legislative session against a bill to provide state funding to a pilot program of community schools, sponsored by Tucson Sen. David Bradley, Fillmore stated his feelings about schools becoming conduits for social programs.

"This is a little disturbing to me that we would actually be creating the kind of school that would be detrimental to the free enterprise system that this country was built upon, the premise of people being able to take care of themselves...I don't think this is what our education system should be."

Jerry Would Like Some Feedback

A request from this writer. Please let me know how I am doing. I write this column in the isolation of my office and send it to an unseen editor who, in turn, publishes it for hundreds of unseen readers. Do you find value in what I write about? Would you like to see more of something and less of something else? Do I need to improve my writing skills? Should I give it up? Do you disagree with my conclusions? I am not looking for praise, but an honest critique about what takes many hours of reading and writing to produce each month. I look forward to your constructive criticism sent to cerrada68@gmail.com. Thanks.



Legislative News

Jerry Holmes



Finchem Aims to Stifle Teachers

During last year's legislative session, Oro Valley Rep. Mark Finchem introduced legislation that would have established a classroom code of ethics for teachers. Writing about the proposal last January, I noted that Finchem had copied the code from the **Stop K-12 Indoctrination!** website. I also noted, "**SK-12I** is funded by the David Horowitz Freedom Center. The Southern Poverty Law Center has described the Freedom Center as a far-right organization and a "driving force of the anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant and anti-black movements".

Mr. Finchem's proposal was not even assigned to a committee for deliberation last year. Even the Republican Speaker of the House, Rusty Bowers, did not find enough merit in the bill to push it to consideration.

In October, Rep. Finchem filed for an initiative to be placed on the ballot in 2020 that would require the state Board of Education to adopt a "classroom code of conduct". That code of conduct is closely aligned with his earlier bill.

If the initiative were to pass, teachers would not be allowed to express opinions about any political issue, politician, or even a failed candidate of the last fifty years. Teachers would be allowed to comment only on laws enacted **prior** to 1971 as well as political parties that have not existed since then.

A well-written opinion piece by a local educator addressing the initiative appeared in the December 6 edition of the **Arizona Daily Star**. Mr. Finchem and his backers have until July 2, 2020 to gather at least 237,645 valid signatures to put the measure on the ballot.



Public vs. Private

Jerry Holmes



Starving the system – continued efforts to privatize the only other great equalizer in the United States

An interesting juxtaposition has been seen in Arizona recently. US Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos came to the state to talk with legislators and others gathered at a recent American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) event in Scottsdale. Ms. DeVos is pushing for a federal tax credit for private school tuition. She praised Arizona for “being a real leader” in the field of giving away taxes to support private schools. Ms. DeVos proclaimed, “...I’m so grateful for the example you are setting here.”

Arizona has for years allowed individuals and corporations to avoid paying taxes by granting tax credits for donating funds to private school tuition organizations. Arizona also allows approximately 6000 students to receive Empowerment Scholarship Accounts (ESA), i.e. vouchers. Those accounts allow the parent to apply the voucher, in the amount the state would spend to educate their child, to private school tuition. That amount may range from less than \$5,000 to \$30,000 for a special-needs student. Expansion of the ESA program was defeated by voters by a 2-1 margin in 2018. Despite that failure at the ballot box, Gov. Ducey touted Arizona’s program while with DeVos and urged her to take her proposal nationwide.

Arizona’s ESA system rules allow four percent of the amount administered to be used for administrative costs. That would allot \$3.6 million to the Department of Education for overseeing the program. The current state budget only allocates \$1.3 million to the Dept. of Ed. to supervise the program.

Arizona’s ESA system rules allow four percent ... (\$3.6 million) ... to the Department of Education for overseeing the program.

Supt. of Instruction Kathy Hoffman recently pointed this out and requested more funding for the ESA division of her department in the upcoming budget. Hoffman has received loud criticism in the past for the slow response time to some parent’s voucher requests. However, when the issue of increasing the oversight budget was raised with Gov. Ducey, he would not commit to additional funds.

The current state budget only allocates \$1.3 million to the Dept. of Ed...

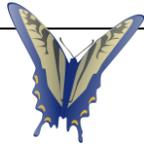
Ducey said, “I believe we can do better on Educational Savings Accounts... We are going to review the budget request in proper order.” Ducey promised to “work closely with the superintendent so we can fix this issue.”

A spokesperson for Dept. of Ed. pointed out that the Auditor General had directed them to focus on expenditures of parents who already receive the vouchers to ensure the money is spent appropriately. The low number of employees (12) in the ESA division has led to slow response times to some parents’ requests. An audit report for the year before Hoffman took office found more than \$700,000 in inappropriate expenditures, leading to the directive from the Auditor General. Hoffman’s proposal would allow for hiring 20 additional staffers in an effort to streamline the process.

In a similar vein, Supt. Hoffman has requested \$556,000 in additional funding to expand the Dept. of Education’s investigations unit. The unit currently has one chief, an administrative assistant, and four investigators. Hoffman’s request would double the number of investigators and add another assistant. The unit currently investigates 120-150 allegations of teacher misconduct each year. It currently takes an average of 24 months to resolve cases.

See **Public vs. Private** on Page 8

Farewell



- BARNETT**, Patricia ~ 11/25;
Speech Therapist at Marana USD
- CURRY**, Patricia, (79) ~ 10/12; Teacher
- HOAGLAND**, Patricia (76) ~ 11/4;
Teacher's Aide
- LEITH**, Maureen (74) ~ 11/11;
Teacher
- LOPEZ**, Jeanne (74) ~ 11/13;
Educator TUSD
- MASEK**, Susan (84) ~ 11/5;
Teacher and Principal SUSD
- O'CALLAGHAN**, Katherine (89) ~
11/15; Math Teacher TUSD
- MCELWEE**, Ronald (72) ~ 11/12;
Special Ed. and P.E. Teacher TUSD
- MORGAN**, Lorena, (89) ~ 11/10;
Teacher, Nov. 10
- MURGUIA**, Lucille R., (71) ~ 10/31;
High school clerk, Oct. 31
- PADILLA**, Miguel 'Mike' (80) ~ 11/27;
Industrial Arts Teacher Pueblo High
- SEMANICK**, Brenda (62) ~ 11/11;
Art Teacher Sunnyside and
Desert View High Schools
- SHERMAN**, Virginia (80) ~ 11/7; Teacher
- TRAN**, Lan (86) ~ 11/8; Teacher



Public vs. Private continued from Page 7

Currently, ADE does not have the authority to investigate noncertified staff such as aides, coaches, and uncertified teachers in schools. As you know from previous columns, our schools are currently staffed by about 50% uncertified teachers. The State Board of Education is seeking to expand the oversight by ADE to include other school staff and uncertified teachers by drafting legislation that would expand the departments oversight. Obviously, the addition of more teaching/support staff to potentially investigate would increase the existing case load of the investigations unit.

Editorial questions follow: So Gov. Ducey believes we should continue to send tax dollars to for-profit institutions to fund private schools, but doesn't think we should spend money to increase oversight of taxpayer's money? And Gov. Ducey's past meager budgets have led to this shortage of teachers, leading to unqualified people in classrooms. But, the oversight of those unqualified personnel has not expanded to cover the risks associated. Where are our Governor's priorities?

What Are People Reading?

Breakfast with Buddha by Roland Merullo

A new way to look at spirituality. Fun to read too!

Carol Holly

Hidden Figures by Margot Lee Shetterly

True story of brilliant African-American women working for NASA. Brains behind the launch of John Glenn.

Cecilia Taylor

N is for Noise by Sue Grafton

Whichever one of the series that I'm reading at the moment because it keeps my mind busy.

Lela Freiman