Welcome to 2017! This E Blast is our district newsletter and its look continues to evolve. Hopefully readers will find the table of contents helpful in quickly finding articles in this scroll down format. There’s lots here, enjoy! RL

**TRS Retirement Seminar**

The posters are going up throughout the county announcing our annual seminar.

The event is free for all public education employees who may be retiring in the next five years.
**Saturday, February 25**

**Vista Hills Elementary School**

10801 La Subida Drive  
(off Lomaland Drive north of I-10)

Registration begins at 8:30 AM  
Program is 9:00 AM – Noon

**RVSP**

before February 18  
in order to have a TRS Packet available.

**Contacts**

Sally Soderstrom at 779-6785 or [annstrom70@aol.com](mailto:annstrom70@aol.com)  
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Sandy Hernandez at 433-3396 or [sandra1hernandez@gmail.com](mailto:sandra1hernandez@gmail.com)  
Ruth Frith at 549-6871

At release time, the TRS Representative who will be presenting the up-to-date information from TRS had not been confirmed.

This event is sponsored by the El Paso Retired Teachers Association (EPRTA), El Paso Lower Valley Retired Teachers Association (EPLVRTA), Ysleta Retired School Employees Association (YRSEA) and TRTA District 19.
Graduate Scholarship

Master’s Degree in Education Grant

The Graduate Scholarship Committee developed the district’s plan for a scholarship which was approved as presented by the Executive Board on January 17, 2017.

A teacher employed in a public school in the TEA Region XIX Area will be awarded a grant of up to $1,000 in reimbursements for fees, tuition, books and materials over a calendar year. The teacher must have earned at least six hours towards a Master’s Degree in Education and have a degree plan at a university. An application packet is available from the Chairperson, Erma Nelson, and can be requested by calling 915-851-3145 or 915-526-0172, or via email: CMHERMIT@aol.com.

Applications will be accepted in February and March 2017. The Committee will evaluate the applications in April 2017. The teacher will be awarded the grant at the District 19 Spring Leadership Conference on May 16, 2017.

Silent Auction

At our fall conference on October 10, 2017, we will have our first ever silent auction. Our goal is to raise $2,000 so we can support two grants beginning in 2018.

If you are interested on serving on this committee or have a donation for the auction, please contact Rosemary Leiman at 915-860-0221, 915-740-6830 or april2101@yahoo.com.

Legislative Report

Paul Pearson, District 19 Legislative Chairman, attended the TRTA State Legislative Committee Meeting in Austin on January 17, 2017. These are the meeting notes.
Ronnie Jung reported that the TRS Pension Trust Fund is in great shape. It had a return of 7.4% during the last financial year. The funding period is 33.6 years meaning that we cannot get an increase in our payouts unless that number is below 30 years. The defined benefit vs defined contribution debate continues. Our message is, “don’t mess with the pension plan”.

Our message to our legislators is that our premiums are up and our benefits are down. We have not had a cost of living increase in twelve years. We must be involved in the current legislative session through e-mails and phone calls. Let them know the effect on us if they don’t take action to improve TRS Care. Since they understand numbers, we have 10,292 annuitants in El Paso County with a payout of 226.4 million dollars.

Another number they track is the number of people in TRS who vote in election for the TRS Advisory Board. That’s coming up so look in for the ballot in the coming months in the newsletter from TRS.Vote!!

TRTA is looking for people from each district that can speak about the effect on them if the legislature does nothing and the interim study group report on TRS Care becomes reality. We need to put real faces and real stories to the data. If you are interested, contact the president of your association.

The bill affecting WEP will be reintroduced, possibly as part of a tax bill by Republicans. The firefighters will provide less opposition since they have other issues. Since the two parties don’t want to work together, it comes down to the majority.

In closing, it was a pretty gloomy meeting. The legislature has so many financial needs and is short about five billion dollars. We have many friends in Austin so don’t give up. Our message comes in two questions to our legislators. Will you support a fair and viable alternative to make health care accessible and affordable for education retirees? Will you please support the continuation of our defined benefit plan? I’m meeting with each of the legislators from El Paso next week and asking those two questions. Paul
Fall Conference 2016 Review

Our fall conference was attended by 159 members and supporters making it the biggest in recent memory. It began with everyone singing “God Bless America” and concluded with four state representatives and two staffers answering our questions. In between we enjoyed Fran Plemmon’s TRTA Update, AMBA, Our Foundation Presentation featuring descriptive posters (We collected over 696 dollars!!!), Humana representatives in the foyer, our business meeting, passing a new budget, lunch, a healthy stretch and a great Legislative Session.

On Monday evening we took Fran out to dinner at Famous Dave’s Barbeque. Above, Norma K. Irwin shares another keen insight or the story preceding the punchline.
Members gather in the Wyndham Ballroom and enjoy the fall decorations and colors. The conference is a good excuse to see and “catchup” with former colleagues and friends.

Fran Plemmons spoke to a packed house.
The audience listened intently to each of the presentations.

Lemuel Harrison spoke about AMBA and after lunch conducted a drawing for a crisp $100 bill.
The Foundation Committee held up descriptive posters as Hank Dunbar explained the various ways that retired and active teachers are supported by the programs.

The Committee collected $696.10 for the Foundation!
Merita Zoga gave a spellbinding TRS Presentation that was the highlight of the conference for many members.
After lunch, Paul Pearson, our “rookie” District 19 Legislative Chairperson, gave the Legislative Report.
Our representatives and staff members took over the stage and podium for the final hour of the program. Above, Sito Negron, represents State Senator, Jose Rodriguez.

State representative, Cesar Blanco, welcomes the newest member of the delegation, Lina Ortega, for the all of us.
Representative Joe Moody takes his turn at the microphone.

Lina Ortega spoke to us and will be sworn in as our representative on January 10, 2017.
Mary Gonzalez was out of town and represented by Joshua Carter.

The dean of the delegation, Representative Joe Pickett delivered a heartfelt and humorous message.

We are extremely fortunate to have such a knowledgeable and supportive legislative delegation representing El Paso.

They even stayed to answer our questions!
Bylaws Committee

The Bylaws Committee will be chaired by Jackie Morgan Tomko. She is asking that two members from each local unit serve on this committee. The first committee meeting will be announced at the next District 19 Executive Board Meeting on April 18, 2017.

TRTA State Convention

“TRTA: Teamwork is Key”

March 27-29, 2017 in Austin
Hosted at the Hilton at 500 E. 4th St.

We hope to have twenty delegates represent our district at this year’s convention and rally day. A slot or two may remain to be filled, check with your local unit president.

The district caucus meetings are held just before the Welcome and Awards Dinner kicks off the festivities on Monday evening. Tuesday begins with the Foundation Breakfast followed by training sessions, the Legislative Luncheon and the House of Delegates Session. On Wednesday, all of the action is at the Capitol as we rally in our red shirts concluding the afternoon with an ice cream social. For more information, please see the latest Voice.

Executive Board Meeting

Tuesday, April 18: Time and Location TBA
Spring Leadership Training Conference
Tuesday, May 16
9:30 AM – 2:00 PM
Region XIX Service Center

Fall Convention 2017
Tuesday, October 10
10:00 AM – 2:00 PM
Wyndham at the El Paso Airport

District 19 Odds and Ends
All eyes are on Austin and the 85th Legislature between now and Memorial Day. Please read the Inside Line and stay tuned to the developments from Tim Lee’s perspective.

Readers can expect the next issues in early March, late April and late July/early August (after the District President’s Conference the second week of July).

Any comments are appreciated, please e-mail Ron Leiman at ronleiman2@gmail.com.