

THE GOOD LIFE

The Newsletter of the Nanaimo-Ladysmith Retired Teachers' Association

Oct. 2013

2013-2014 Nanaimo-Ladysmith Retired Teachers Executive

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If you wish to help in any capacity, have ideas or information do not hesitate to contact any member of the executive.

If you know of a project or presentation that you feel would be of interest to other members please email it to Les Ellis and it will be sent out upon review.

President's Message

The Nanaimo-Ladysmith RTA branch had an interesting year. Our numbers increased and we have an active and committed Executive. The Branch's Annual General Meeting of June 2012 saw a few changes in the Executive. The various committees are looking for members to help out, so if you are interested please contact me or any other member of the Executive.

Our branch has continued to support the Nanaimo-Ladysmith Schools Foundation by working on special projects. We also offer two district scholarships each year. The criteria for the awards have been revised and we have decided to offer two specific awards to District students. One of the N-L RTA scholarships is for someone going into the Trades and the other for a student going on to study at a university. There will now be a committee formed every year to vet the awards' applications and make a decision as to who will receive them. If you think this might be something you would be interested in doing please contact me.

The month long educational retrospective held at the Nanaimo Museum was very well done and was a great success. Deryck Cowling, Vicki Harrison and the rest of the Heritage Committee worked hard and deserve a 'pat on the back.'

The N-L RTA also applied for and received funds from the BCRTA that was to be used to bring issues of importance to the attention of our members and the general public during the election in May. After a long discussion the consensus of the Executive was that the issue of poverty for both seniors and children was something we could universally support.

As well, representatives of the Nanaimo-Ladysmith RTA have signed an agreement with Around the World Travel. This agreement, which we believe is a real win-win for us, means that our branch will, at the year's end, receive a small percentage of monies from any travel set up by the agency for our members. The money we receive is designated for our awards.

The BCRTA AGM was held in Richmond in mid-September and was attended by Les Ellis, Lynn Peterson and myself. Reports about the activities and information presented at the AGM were relayed to the membership at our October lunch (and are printed here). At that time Les spoke in some detail about our Pension Plan and Pacific Blue Cross.

Our October lunch was well attended and Masters' Touch Catering provided us with a very good lunch. We enjoyed the company of several new retirees and a good time was had by all.

I am sure that we will have another good year with lots of good things been done by our members as volunteers for any number of diverse groups both locally and overseas. Please remember that if you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me or any member of the Executive.

Membership Report

As of Sept. 13, 2013, we have 510 members in the Nanaimo-Ladysmith Retired Teacher's Association.

Unless directed otherwise, all members receive a phone call or email announcing the upcoming luncheons. This 2013-14 year they will be held: Tuesday, December 3, 2013 (Christmas celebration); Tuesday, March 4, 2014 and Tuesday, May 6, 2014 (Annual General Meeting – election of our executive and delegates to the BCRTA AGM).

Newsletters are mailed twice a year to every member who is not on our email list. Those on email get articles sent separately throughout the year as they come in. If you hear of a member who is not receiving their invitations to lunches or the newsletters, please contact Pat Hogue (Membership Chair) at 250 753 5971 or phogue@shaw.ca or any member of the executive, so we can remedy this.

Remember to let both the local and provincial branches know if you change your email address or phone number. You can phone the provincial office toll -free at 1 877 683 2243 or email them at kristi@bcrt.com for more information.

Provincial Pension Plan Report 2013

This report was presented to the Provincial AGM by Gerry Tiede, Chairman of the Pensions and Benefits Committee for the BC Retired Teachers' Association. Please note that this is a watchdog committee for the retired teachers. Our pension is controlled by the BCTF and government representatives through the BC Pensions Corporation. As the 2013 fiscal year is not complete, all numbers relate to 2012 or earlier.

2012 was a good year for the pension fund. In 2011 the net assets of the fund were 13.9 billion. At the end of 2012 these assets rose to 15.2 billion. At the same time the inflation adjustment fund rose from 3 to 3.1 billion.

2011 was a slow year with investment income rising only 532 million, while in 2012 the income rose by 1.8 billion (more than 3 times as much). This is important because investment income pays 80 % of our pension. The size of our pension allows for more diversification of the investments and access to more markets, while making it more efficient and better able to manage risk.

In 2011 our rate of return on investments was only 3.1%. In 2012 this rate jumped to 10.4%. This is important because every 3 years an auditor looks at our 5 year average return for two reasons. First, if the 5 year average is 6.5% or better, the active BCTF members will probably be able to avoid a contribution increase. Also the rate of return affects the Inflation Adjustment Account and whether we get an indexed raise in January. Our January increase is determined by the Consumer Price Index of September each year.

The last 2 weeks of this September saw gas prices decline which will lower the Index. It was announced October 18 that the September Index was 1.1%..

2008 was a very bad year for investing. Our pension lost 12.8%. In 2009 there was no January increase and in January 2010 there was less than a normal increase to cover the losses from the previous year. For 2012, our 5 year average is at 3.8% but this year that negative percentage from 2008 will be dropped and it is expected that this year and 2014, before the next audit, will see the 5 year average reach the 6.5% number.

In the last 10 years, 2003 to 2012 the number of active teachers has dropped by 2500. This means fewer contributions to the pension plan. On the other hand, since 2007 fewer teachers have been retiring each year and drawing pensions. The spike in 2007 was just over 2000 retirees while in 2012 it was less than 1500. Teachers are working longer, whether they come to teaching later in life or, a modern fact, it takes longer to get hired into fulltime, continuing positions.

Last year the teacher pension plan paid out one billion dollars across the province. That is one huge benefit to the economy of the communities of BC and the provincial tax coffers. Wouldn't it be nice if every retiree had a pension plan?

You can now check your pension plan online. Type in **www.tpp.pensionsbc.ca**. Once the site is loaded click on "Retired Members" in the centre of the page. To register the first time you go to "Register Now" on the new page. This is found below "Login" and "My Account" on the left hand side of the page. To register, you need your personal ID number, which is found on the top right corner of any of your pension statements. If you don't have a pension statement handy, you can call the Pension Corp for it or wait until this January's statement in the mail. This is a new service so it only has your payment history back to January 1, 2013. In the future you will not only be able to see your payment history but also your tax information and you will be able to print your own T4s.

"Teacher" Newsmagazine of the BCTF

With fewer teachers in the classroom, the BCTF is collecting fewer dues and, like many corporations and institutions, is looking to cut costs. One of the ways they have decided to do this is to reduce the number of Teacher magazines being printed.

In the past, all active teachers got the magazine in their mailbox at school, distributed by the staff rep. From now on there will only be one copy for every three teachers at a school.

Retired teachers will not be sent a copy in the mail. YOU will no longer receive a copy in the mail unless you notify the BCTF that you still want it sent to you. There is also an online version of the magazine which you can access at bctf.ca/newsmag. Send an email to the BCTF at magdistribution@bctf.ca. Include your name and address if you want the printed copy at home. Include your name and email address to be notified when a new edition is posted online

Heritage Committee

The Heritage Committee is meeting on Monday mornings in room 159 at 9:30 am. We are getting close to the completion of cataloging the texts. We are privileged to have Pat Parkin volunteering to do this work for us. In the past we were able to pay her a small amount, but she knew that our funds were limited, so she offered to continue to work on the collection. We are looking for volunteers with good computer skills who would be willing to learn the process from Pat. We also thank everyone for their contributions to the collection, but are asking you to hold on to texts for now.

Stock the Lockers Campaign

In Mid-August an email went out to our members for volunteers to help the Nanaimo Schools Foundation by packing school essentials for needy students in the upcoming school year. Announcements also went out by other media. In the past this has been a well supported project of the N-LRTA. This year, however, only 6 people showed up to help and only 1 was a N-LRTA member. It is hoped that next year we'll get a better turnout of volunteers from our group.

Health Care

You can now look up your Pacific Blue Cross account online. Register at their website www.pac.bluecross.ca/corp/member. This is the Caresnet site for Pacific Blue Cross. Once you register with your plan number you can find "Benefits and Eligibility" which will tell you what is covered by your plan, what the deductibles are and what the limits are for specific problems (i.e. eyeglasses).

At this site you can go to "Claims History" and review a list of what claims you have accessed the plan for. It shows all dental and health claims. It shows you individual claims and total amounts. Click the "View" button to the right of your claim and you will see what you paid, what you were paid by Blue Cross and how much is left of your lifetime limit for that type of claim.

By showing you what you have paid for the year, this site helps you with your taxes. Add up the total amounts you paid for yourself and all your dependents. Include the medical portion of your travel insurance. If you are on Johnson Travel through the retired teachers, this amount will be listed on your renewal letter. If everything your family paid is over 3% of the net income of the lowest salary, these expenses can be claimed for a tax refund. You can also check the Canada Revenue Agency website to learn what medical expenses are eligible.

You can print a claim form at the Caresnet site and send it in with your receipts. However, if you sign up for Direct Deposit, you can speed up the process and email your form for vision, physiotherapy, chiropractor and massage claims. Just keep your receipts in case you are asked for proof later.

Want to save money? The next time you get a prescription, log on to Pharmacy Compass. www.pharmacycompass.ca. This is another branch of the Blue Cross website. After agreeing to the terms of use for the site, a new page will ask you the name of the drug, the size of the dosage and your location. When you type in this information the website searches for drug stores from which previous claims have been made in your area. The results name the drug stores found, their location, the cost per original pill, the cost of a generic pill and the dispensing fees.

I tried this with a sample drug. When I typed in Nanaimo I got 2 results: downtown and the north end. I used the north end which gave me 3 drug stores. There was an expanded search button so I tried that and got 10 drug stores. Four drug stores did not fill with the original pill. Those that did fill with the original, charged from \$1.40 to \$1.70 per pill. All 10 drug stores supplied the generic equivalent pill and charged between 36 cents and 49 cents per pill. One pharmacy charged \$4.50 for a dispensing fee of my example drug, one charged \$9.60 and the rest charged \$10.00 or more.

Why is this important? Blue Cross is a non-profit organization. After paying their employees, all money from our monthly fees go out in claim payments. The more we claim high priced prescriptions the more money the company needs, fees could go up. Blue Cross pays only 80% of your claim. The higher you claim, the more that comes out of your own pocket. The most Blue Cross pays for a dispensing fee is \$10.00 (read \$8.00 because you only get 80% back). Any dispensing fee over \$8.00 is coming out of your own pocket.

Questions about Pacific Blue Cross?

The Teachers' Pension Plan Board of Trustees has a contract with Pacific Blue Cross (PBC) to provide the Extended Health Care and the Dental Plan to pension plan members.

If you have questions about your claims, the best way to get an explanation is to call **PBC at 1 888 275-4672**.

If you are not satisfied with the explanation given, ask to speak to a supervisor.

If you are still not satisfied with the answer, ask PBC to provide you with the information to go through their appeal process.

If you have a complaint about PBC's service or wish to suggest a change to the insurance coverage you should write to the Teachers' Pension Board of Trustees with your requests.

The Trustees meet regularly with PBC officials to review service issues and to consider plan changes.

Email: TPBT@pensionbc.ca

Mailing Address:

**Teachers' Pension Board Secretariat
Pension Corporation
PO Box 9460
Victoria, BC V8W 9V8**

The BCRTA is **not** able to communicate with PBC or the Teachers' Pension Board of Trustees on individual issues or complaints because of privacy issues. The BCRTA does not have any contractual relationship with PBC on these plans. However, if you copy the BCRTA Pensions and Benefits Committee with your correspondence on plan improvements, they can discuss the suggestions with the Trustees through our participation at Teachers' Pension Plan Advisory Committee meetings.

Retired Teacher Travel

Last September at the provincial AGM the delegates brainstormed ideas for local associations to raise money. One idea was to use a travel agency to get special deals for retired teachers and to get a percentage return. As a result, the Smith Foundation has taken up this practice provincially.

At our June 2013 N-LRTA AGM, the membership voted permission for the Executive to work out an understanding with Around the World Travel on Commercial Street in Nanaimo. The results follow:

First, realize that using Around the World Travel is entirely voluntary on your part.

Around the World Travel has designated two agents to deal with our retired teacher members. Be sure to let them know you are part of the retired teacher association when you call or go in. You can book your own holidays through the agents and you can also directly book flights from their website. Around the World Travel will try to find you the best deals possible so that "special savings" are provided. Two of our executive have booked their upcoming holidays with Around the World and had substantial savings from what they could find elsewhere.

The agency will also look for tours they believe will be of special interest to retired teachers and get them the best rates possible. Our part of this agreement is to forward tour information through our email member list.

This year is a trial period for the agreement and, if it continues, the agreement will be reviewed annually. Around the World Travel has agreed to refund a percentage of any holidays booked through them by retired teachers. This money will go to help pay for or increase the N-LRTA Scholarship Fund which pays out our scholarships each year to graduating students.

We do not know how often Around the World will be used by members or how much money we can generate for our scholarships. Last spring, when we started these discussions, the owner of Around the World Travel generously donated \$500 to our scholarship programme to show his interest in working with us. Whether a flat rate payout continues or our percentage of return is higher remains to be seen.

Here are some upcoming trips that may be of interest. Contact Karen or Louise at Around the World Travel 250-753-2282 (karen@atwt.ca) for further details.

January 19-26, 2014 - Country Music Cruise

Holland America

Vince Gill, Kenny Rogers, Ronnie Milsap, Patty Loveless and more

\$3275.00 per person includes return airfare to Fort Lauderdale, 7 night cruise, all performances

January 26 – February 9, 2014 (15 days - Hawaii)

return airfare

6 nights in Honolulu with day tours

Norwegian 7 day cruise to Maui, Hilo, Kona and Kauai

late afternoon or evening flight at the end of Day 14 means Day 15 is a morning home arrival

March 9 – April 1, 2014 Chile with Andes & South America Cruise

24 days – starts by flying to Santiago, finishes by flying LA to Vancouver

6 days in Santiago

Princess Cruises

other stops include elsewhere in Chile, plus Peru, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Mexico