

## 2015 Annual Meeting Delivers!

The 2015 Annual Meeting delivered state government and retiree benefit updates, as well as interesting workshops, also providing relevant vendor interaction and opportunities for entertainment and socializing with old friends and former co-workers, all in the scenic confines of first time venue, historic Savannah.



GSRA President Russell Hinton opens the 2015 Annual Meeting

Despite some initially soggy weather, the GSRA 2015 Annual Meeting got off to a great start and gathered momentum as GSRA members from around the state met at the Coastal Georgia Center in Savannah, August 17-18. Members heard from state elected officials and government representatives about plans for Georgia government's operational future, from GSRA's Legislative Liaison about the organization's effectiveness during the 2015 Legislative Session, to GSRA's leadership about GSRA's future plans. By the end of the meeting, members had opportunities to attend relevant workshops, hear from state leadership about the current status of both ERS pension and SHBP insurance, and opportunities to interact with vendors and sponsors in the exhibition area. In addition, attendees were entertained by Savannah tours, the Welcome Reception and chances to win great door prizes.

The 2015 Annual Meeting held its opening session on Monday, August 17, when members convened in the auditorium to be welcomed by GSRA President Russell Hinton and Savannah area State Representative Ron

Stephens. Attendees then received a SHBP update from Jeffrey Rickman, SHBP Division Chief from Department of Community Health. Afterwards, members scattered in different directions for the afternoon, some heading to tours of Savannah and some heading to the *Local Chapter Officers Training*, while others attended session one of the *AARP Smart Driver Program*.

Capping off Monday's activities, the evening Welcome Reception, also held at the Coastal Georgia Center, featured finger foods, beverages and live music by local band *Danielle Hicks & the Eight Ohm Resistance*.



Danielle Hicks & the Eight Ohm Resistance perform

Tuesday, August 18, was beautifully clear as members made their way from local hotels to the Coastal Georgia Center for a full day of Annual Meeting activities. During the morning, members attended two workshops of their choice, picking from *Cyber Security*, *Georgia Probate Law*, *GA Alzheimer's Plan* and *Future of Retiree Benefits (ERS)* or attended session two of the *AARP Smart Drivers Program*. After a box lunch in the main auditorium, members heard from Annual Meeting Main Speaker, Chuck

Clay, GSRA's Legislative Liaison. Mr. Clay provided an in-depth look at the undesirable legislation that GSRA was able to influence being stopped during the session. He also gave members the benefit of his experience as both a State Senator and as a legislative liaison to provide some advice on how members should get involved at the local level in order to influence their elected officials.



Chuck Clay, GSRA's Legislative Liaison, addresses members

Next, GSRA Board Member and Southwest Local Chapter President Bob Pollack moderated a panel discussion on *Governmental Operations in the Future*. Panel members were Ms. Teresa MacCartney, State CFO and Director of OPB, State Senator Renee Unterman, Vice-Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, and State Representative Brooks Coleman, Chair of the House Education Committee and member of the House Appropriations and Retirement committees. Each panel member provided a brief summary of his/her view of future Georgia state government operations and then each had a turn at answering questions solicited from the audience.



Panel of Rep. Coleman, Sen. Unterman and State CFO MacCartney

Following on the agenda was the Business Meeting, with GSRA's President Russell Hinton leading off by enumerating what GSRA was able to accomplish during 2015, identifying the hiring of a professional Legislative Liaison, automatic deduction of member dues from retirement benefits, helping to stop unfavorable legislation and, even though the outcome was not favorable, working with GSRA's legal counsel, former Governor Roy Barnes, to determine definitively (at least at this time) that ERS members do not have a successful legal argument to sue for COLAs. Hinton then presented the 2014 Annual Meeting Minutes and the GSRA Financial Report for approval. In order to modify the GSRA officer and board member terms of office, Hinton presented a proposal to suspend the 15-day notice period for By-Law modifications. Following approval, he presented and members approved the change to make the terms of office begin and end on the calendar year. GSRA's President-Elect Kip Mann led members through officer and board elections for 2016 that are shown on page 5 of this newsletter. Newly elected President for 2016, Mann outlined GSRA's plans for the future, detailed in the following article.

Finally, after all Annual Meeting business was conducted, the activity for which members had been waiting arrived - drawings for the many wonderful door prizes. Many members left the 2015 Annual Meeting not only with a lot more information related to their retiree benefits and the state government arena, but also with a great door prize to commemorate an Annual Meeting that delivered!



GSRA members at the 2015 Annual Meeting

## Summary of GSRA Future Plans 2015

**Affirming present and past state employees' and educators' pride in services rendered, incoming 2016 President Kip Mann outlined GSRA's future plans during the 2015 Annual Meeting/Business Meeting. The plans include Marketing, Collaborative, Feedback and Advocacy initiatives that target the value of present and past state employees' and educators' service to the state and seek to gain a closer partnership with the Governor and state leadership to achieve mutually beneficial goals, including improved services to the citizens of Georgia.**

At the Georgia State Retirees Association's (GSRA) 2015 Annual Meeting: *Georgia's Future: Where Do We Go From Here*, the 2016 President, Kip Mann, presented GSRA's future initiatives. GSRA members overwhelmingly agreed by a show of hands to pursue each initiative. Additionally, the membership agreed that:

We are proud of our past and present service to the State of Georgia and wish for Georgia's government to be the best as she faces the challenges of the future, and would like to offer our continued service to State Government in any fashion that the Governor sees fit. Therefore, we propose a closer working relationship between the Office of the Governor, the Legislature, and active and retired state employees and teachers to best prepare Georgia to meet the challenges of the future.

As you know, the GSRA membership represents a cross-section of active state employees and teachers, as well as, retired state employees and teachers. Recently, several organizations and associations have agreed to collaborate and work together in partnership with us to achieve common interests and goals. The membership affirmed overwhelmingly that the following initiatives be pursued for the betterment of state government.

- **Our Mission:** To demonstrate by actions and deeds our goal of improving the operation and delivery of services to the people of Georgia.
- **Our Purpose:** To continue to offer our service to state government in any manner that is deemed appropriate for us to assume.
- **Our Objective:** To improve the quality of life for the citizens of Georgia, including ourselves and our families.

- **Our Plan:** To meet with the Governor and his staff to discuss ways we can support his efforts to improve Georgia's service delivery system to the citizens of Georgia.

In preparation for a possible scheduled meeting with the Governor, we would like to share with him our plans for the future that were approved by our members who attended the 2015 Annual Meeting and, through this article, are being presented to the membership at large for your endorsement and support.

### Future Plans

#### **Marketing Plans:**

To actively market the value of work and service that is and was performed by state employees, retirees and GSRA to the citizens of Georgia and State Government officials.

To continue to offer these services by seeking volunteers from our association and other collaborative associations to partner with active state employees and teachers to meet the demands for services offered to citizens of Georgia.

#### **Collaborative Plans:**

To actively collaborate and develop partnerships with organizations or associations whose memberships include active state employees and/or teachers, and retirees of TRS or ERS and **State Government** to achieve mutually beneficial goals.

#### **Feedback Plans:**

Through a formalized process offer suggestions and ideas for making current policies, procedures and practices that provide benefits to active employees, teachers and all state retirees, such as health insurance plans, receive open and transparent review to protect the interests of all parties

involved, and ensure that benefits provided are in line with other similar plans to provide incentives to position Georgia to retain competent employees who provide excellent service to our fellow citizens.

#### Advocacy Plans:

Through the political and budgetary process in collaboration with the Governor's Office request state funds to:

Provide sufficient employer contributions to the ERS and TRS for the trust funds to recoup the losses in recent years and move the financial positions closer to a "funded ratio" of 100% of liabilities that was experienced in the 1990s and early 2000s (we request that this be achieved gradually over several fiscal years by raising and/or stabilizing the employer contribution to the ERS and TRS retirement funds with increases as funds are identified).

Provide sufficient funds to active state employees and teachers to receive a raise in salary of 3% (an approximate request of \$399 million in FY 2017).

Provide sufficient funds (an approximate funding request of \$365 million in the FY 2017 budget) for retirees of all systems, who are eligible to, but do not currently receive a COLA, to receive a COLA of 1.5% in July of 2016 and 1.5% in January of 2017.

Admittedly this is a bold and not inexpensive plan, but one of sound investment when fully implemented. It will place Georgia in the position of meeting the challenges of the future, and position those who work/worked hard for our government to plan for their future as well. GSRA and a large portion of retirees view ourselves in the second phase of our government service to the people of this state and wish to continue to contribute as long as we are able. **You pay us; you might as well use us!** We are: "*Paid volunteers in service to Georgia!*" It would be a small cost when you consider how the state's workforce could be augmented with experienced volunteers. State retirees cover the spectrum of all state services at all levels of state government, and a lot of us who can want to continue to contribute. It's in our best interest!

We look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience knowing full well that the budget process for the coming year is being developed now and there are precious few new funds available for allocation. It would be great to see this year touted as the year of *Georgia's Investment in its Human Infrastructure to Improve State Services to Meet Future Challenges!*

You can provide feedback regarding GSRA's Plans for the Future to [president@myGSRA.com](mailto:president@myGSRA.com). Thank you!

## GSRA Initiates Collaboration with Other Associations

The GSRA Board invited organizations with similar objectives to a luncheon at the Annual Meeting to discuss ways in which we might collaborate on subjects of mutual interest. Building upon past GSRA efforts to raise our visibility with elected officials, Chuck Clay was hired to represent us at the Capitol. To augment his first year's effort, recognizing that he cannot do the job alone, it was our desire to collaborate with other organizations to expand our impact on issues of mutual interest and importance to GSRA members.

Although the GSRA volunteer members and Legislative Liaison Clay have informally worked with many of these

organizations over the past two years, the collaborative meeting was a part of the effort to expand our joint influences and maximize the grass roots efforts. One of the GSRA volunteer liaisons, John Keys, explained the emphasis of GSRA's grass roots effort that is being made by local chapters to communicate with elected officials. In addition, Keys stated that the local chapter officer training segment would include skill building and additional communication techniques to build political support for the objectives of GSRA members.

The luncheon was the first step to begin building a collaborative team that can speak with one voice and build

political consensus on as many issues as possible. Representatives from the GA School Boards Association, TRAGIC, GA Professional Human Services Association, and the GA School Nutrition Association organizations attended the luncheon. Those in attendance agreed to

continue this dialog in future meetings on this subject and to reach out to other associations to join us in this effort. As the Annual Meeting continued other Associations that attended expressed interest in joining our collaborative effort.

## New Officers and Board Members Elected

GSRA members attending the Annual Meeting elected the following members to serve as 2016 Officers and Board members to guide the organization for Calendar Year 2016. The officers elected will begin serving in their new positions January 1, 2016.

### GSRA 2016 Officers & Board Members

Officers		At-Large Board Members	
Kip Mann	President	Dean Crist	2016-2017
Steve Herndon	President-Elect	John Keys	2016-2017
Connie Smith	Secretary	Beth Morgan	2016-2017
Harold Grindle	Treasurer		

Local Chapter Representatives	
Sam Shepherd, Central Metro	Northern Part of Georgia
Allan Hill, Savannah Coastal	Eastern Part of Georgia
Sallie Mason, Valdosta	Southern Part of Georgia
Bob Pollock, Albany	Western Part of Georgia



## Kip's View: 2015 Annual Meeting

**Incoming GSRA 2016 President pens his impressions of the 2015 Annual Meeting.**

The 9<sup>th</sup> GSRA Annual Meeting was held at the Coastal Georgia Center operated by Georgia Southern University in the heart of Savannah's Historic District on August 17<sup>th</sup>, and 18<sup>th</sup>, 2015. The Center's outstanding facilities and excellent staff were a great support to us!

Contributions from our Annual Partners, Atlanta Postal Credit Union (APCU) and United Health Care (UHC), our 2015 Annual Meeting Supporter, Government Watch of Georgia (3<sup>rd</sup> year of support), and our New 2015 Annual Meeting Sponsor, American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), and exhibitors AMBA, Blue Cross/Blue Shield, GJSA, Home Benefits, SHBP, Youngevity, and the Dolphin Project made this conference one of our lowest cost meetings ever. The Annual Meeting was planned this year in Savannah in August to allow attendees to experience the beauty of Savannah. They could participate in planned "Trolley Tours" of Historic Savannah, self-guided walking tours, and have the opportunity to see, feel, and taste the best that Savannah offered from the comfort of several surrounding hotels and restaurants, all within easy walking distance of the Coastal Georgia Center.

From the opening session on the first day, members were engaged in discussing what GSRA has done in the past and how we are preparing to meet the challenges of the future for the benefit of our members. Before the Annual Meeting began, members and officers of the GSRA Board met with leadership of several organizations and associations who represent the interests of active employees, including teachers, Board of Regents staff and retirees from ERS and TRS. The collaborative luncheon was intended to highlight working together to meet common goals, which has grown out of recent years' work during the legislative sessions to have our collective voices heard on issues of common interest. As a result of this meeting we've already received a request from another association to be included and we'll be asking our membership to identify and refer others to this initiative as it grows and forms.

At the opening session on Monday, Rep. Ron Stephens from Savannah's House District #164 welcomed us, and encouraged us to partake of all the good things Savannah had to offer. The membership responded appreciatively! Next Jeffery Rickman, SHBP Division Chief, spoke on

SHBP health plan offerings for calendar year 2016, where he highlighted that premiums would either remain the same or go down for most plan members, except for High Deductible option plan members, who would see a slight premium increase. Uncertainty still remains as to what direction health insurance benefits provided by SHBP will take in the future, but between now and through next year things should transition smoothly without many surprises. Welcome news for most in attendance.

Following the afternoon sessions and tours, members convened back at the center for the Welcome Reception, where GSRA members, partners, sponsors, presenters and exhibitors met to renew old friendships, make new friendships and just generally relax and socialize.

The second day (August 18) began with morning concurrent workshop sessions, including one from ERS Director Jim Potvin. Afterwards, attendees lined up in the lobby to collect their boxed lunch selections, which they ate in the auditorium. Because of a surge of last minute and on-site registrations, over 300 people attended this year's Annual Meeting. That was both good and bad news and led to us having to bring in extra boxed lunches and some attendees eating a later lunch. Plans are in the works to make plans for similar situations at future meetings. Incidentally, the food provided by the caterer chosen as the vendor for the Coastal Georgia Center was excellent!

GSRA used the afternoon large group session to inform members in attendance what GSRA has done recently for them and in their name, including the presentation by GSRA's Legislative Liaison and the panel discussion with two state elected officials and a government representative, as well as the GSRA reports during the business meeting. Once new officers were elected and the usual assortment of great door prizes awarded, we concluded the 2015 Annual Meeting.

Comments heard by attendees leaving the meeting said that we have set a very aggressive agenda to treat all active and retired employees equitably and as fairly as possible, regardless of who in state government hired them. This objective is to be achieved while being as open as possible, opting to move forward with Georgia's government to position the State to best meet the challenges for all its citizens. Your officers and board look forward to taking up the challenge!

# Save the Date!

## GSRA Day and Legislative Reception

Wednesday, February 3, 2016

### State Capitol/Empire Room Atlanta



Mark your calendars and make plans now to attend both these important events and make your voice heard in 2016.

**Be there!**

## Welcome SHBP RETIREES

### We're back!

We are honored and look forward to serving you in 2015!



Plans are insured through UnitedHealthcare Insurance Company or one of its affiliated companies, a Medicare Advantage organization with a Medicare contract. Enrollment in the plan depends on the plan's contract renewal with Medicare.

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## Endorsed GSRA Benefits

The Georgia State Retirees Association (GSRA) makes many member only benefits available to its members. GSRA endorses the following member benefits:

- Long Term Care / Home Health Care Policy
- Life Insurance
- Medical Air Services Association (MASA)
- Travel Discounts
- Car Rental Discounts
- Tax-Deferred Annuity
- Cancer Treatment Policy
- Medicare Supplement Insurance
- Identity Theft Protection
- Hotel Discounts
- Computer Discounts

Review your benefits at: [www.myAMBAbenefits.info/gsra](http://www.myAMBAbenefits.info/gsra)



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