



December 2022

# THE WATCHDOG REPORT

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF MISSOURI RETIRED TEACHERS ASSOCIATION AND PUBLIC SCHOOL PERSONNEL



**MRTA is your pension watchdog!**



## *Holiday Message from MRTA President Martha Schatz*

As we approach the end of 2022, several thoughts are running through my head.

First, where did the time go? My grandmother always told me time goes faster as you get older. I thought she was a little crazy. Turns out she was right.

Second, I've had so much fun so far as your president. October was a whirlwind and I was exhausted but it was great! The members of this association are the best. I was welcomed and pampered everywhere I went.

Third, working on the Strategic Planning process has been exciting. A lot of great discussion has come out of these meetings and I've learned a lot. I know great things are ahead for our association and I am so excited to share them with you!

I have witnessed the magic of MRTA everywhere I have been and I know there's much more to come.

Wishing all of you a magical holiday season!

*Martha*



## Inspiring Minds You Want to Know

### MRTA Board Members Share Insights, Future Plans and Inspiration for All

*MRTA is indebted to the 26 members of our board. Our elected officers, committee chairpersons, and regional vice presidents provide steady, reliable leadership for MRTA at all levels and in all parts of the state. Their service helps ensure we can successfully meet our goals to promote the professional, social, and economic welfare of all retired school employees, protect pensions for our public school teachers and educational staff, and support Missouri public schools.*

*This month, let's get to know two of our inspiring and influential leaders, Region 4 Vice President Marilyn Skipper and MRTA Region 5 Vice President Wendy Bernier.*

#### Leadership Beyond the Classroom

##### Marilyn Skipper, MRTA Region 4 Vice President

Marilyn Skipper calls herself an introvert. But her quick smile, contagious laughter and jam-packed calendar say otherwise.

With a full career of service as a Missouri public school teacher, extensive leadership experience with MRTA, other professional educational organizations and her church, Marilyn is a shining example of how an active and motivated retiree can be a positive force for helping others.

Talking to Marilyn, you get the sense that her high-energy and passion for what she does comes from a lifelong and deep inner motivation to be involved and make a difference. She is quick, well-spoken and loves to work with numbers. Positions of leadership seems to be second nature to her.

It's also quickly apparent that she is a very busy lady.

"Every once in a while, someone will say to me, 'I thought you

retired,'" she said. "I say, I am doing things I like to do, just sometimes they all come together at once!" She added, "I don't like to just sit around."



Marilyn is an avid traveler and after having visited all 50 states, she has started adding international destinations to her itinerary.

She retired in 1996 after 30 years teaching second and third grade, 27 of those years with Columbia Public Schools. When asked what inspired her to become a teacher, she indicates that her desire to teach started at a very young age.

"I first thought about being a teacher when I was in the third grade," she said. "My mother was a teacher, and she was a good influence on me."

Her mother, who retired from teaching at age 65, was also Marilyn's first connection to MRTA.

"My mother was president of the Boone County Unit about three years before I retired from teaching myself," she said. "So, I knew what MRTA was about and kept up with what they were working on." Both Marilyn and her mother understood the importance of advocating for Missouri's public schools, educators, and staff as well as their retirement.

By 2000, Marilyn had followed in her mother's footsteps again and became president of her local MRTA unit. Despite the fact that she held leadership positions with Delta Kappa Gamma, a professional society for women educators, and Alpha Delta Kappa, an international honorary organization for women educators, she went on to serve nine years as Regional 4 Vice President and then was elected MRTA Secretary.

"I don't mind responsibility, so getting involved at the state level as Secretary didn't bother me at all," she said cheerfully.

She didn't stop there, moving on to become MRTA President in 2013-2014, Past President and then State Membership Chair.

"When I gave up the position of State Membership Chair, I was off the MRTA Board after 18 years," she remembered, with a smile. "That lasted one year." She agreed to step back into the role of MRTA Region 4 Vice President. "When I was asked to do this, I said 'sure,' thinking I would finish the term and find someone else to take over after that." That term ended in September 2022, and Marilyn is still Region 4 VP. "Here I am," she laughed, "back in it for three more years!"

Despite her busy schedule, Marilyn makes her work with MRTA a priority. "If I have scheduling conflicts, I usually turn down the other things to make MRTA responsibilities my focus," she said. "All PSRS members should belong to MRTA. It is the easiest way to protect their pension and the teaching profession they worked for during their careers."

She speaks fondly of her colleagues at MRTA. "We are like a family," she said, "especially the board. We are all here to do our part." As for her future with MRTA, she shows no signs of stopping. "Whatever is needed – if I'm available, I'm happy to do it."

She has enjoyed working with

Executive Director Maria Walden to advocate for both working and retired teachers, and to help ensure their retirement

system remains independent, financially stable and strong.

"Maria has been wonderful to work with," she said.

"She has helped MRTA begin working more closely with other Missouri educational associations, helped us collaborate with other educational professionals. Her past experience and work this year have been a big help for us to get our message heard by lawmakers and protect our public schools and our retirement system," she said.

Maria, in turn, acknowledges the value brought to the table by long-term members and leaders like Marilyn.

"Marilyn is someone we can count on to be there and gets things done," Maria Walden, Executive Director of MRTA said.

"She and others like her are the backbone of this organization, getting the message out at the region and local levels, and moving us forward. Even more importantly, she always has a quick smile and an encouraging word for everyone she meets."

Despite all of her accomplishments as a retiree, Marilyn will always be a teacher at heart. She understands the day-to-day struggles they face.

"There are so many pressures on teachers today," she said. "The curriculum includes so many requirements, there isn't much time left for doing extra things just for fun. That makes it a struggle sometimes to keep students engaged."

Her advice to today's teachers: "Stay positive." She adds, "Remember that even though your schedules are full, and sometimes dealing with parents and administrators can be difficult, your students and their success are what it's all about."



Stay on Santa's nice list this year  
by renewing your MRTA dues!





## Dancing to Her Own Music

Wendy Bernier, Region 5 Vice President

Wendy Bernier sits smiling in front of a well-stocked bookshelf. The volumes on the shelves are kept company by a variety of Snoopy figures. Upon closer reflection, everyone's favorite beagle also adorns her wall and even her clock.

It turns out that Wendy is a big Peanuts fan and is especially fond of Snoopy and his special brand of positivity. Her Snoopy collection, curated over the years as gifts from friends and students, is more than decoration – it's a reflection of her own outlook on life. She proudly displays a ceramic jar she recently received as a gift, complete with images of Snoopy dancing and the saying, 'Dance to Your Own Music.'

"Snoopy is my jam, I love his attitude," she said. "He is always happy and friendly."



Wendy and grandchildren, Joel and Elliot.

Like Snoopy, Wendy exudes a genuine cheerfulness that makes you smile. It's easy to believe that she has succeeded in life by 'dancing to her own music.' And hers is a tune built on service to others both as an educator and as a leader for MRTA.

Wendy began her education career in Ohio, teaching third grade. When she married, she moved to Warrensburg, Missouri, and when she couldn't find work right away, she decided

to go back to school to get her master's degree in reading. Her first Missouri teaching job was teaching third and fourth grade at Farmers School near Warrensburg. "It was literally in the middle of a cornfield," she recalled, "and we taught everything, including art, music and PE."

When she landed a job teaching Title I Reading in Warrensburg, she had found her niche. "I taught mostly first, second and third grade, and loved it, loved it, loved it!" she said. "I called my students my 'reluctant readers.' They just hadn't found their right thing yet.

Once they find what they are interested in reading, they take off."

Wendy retired in 2010 after a 30-year teaching career.

She joined her local MRTA unit in 2011 and quickly moved into the position of unit Vice President the following year. "I got talked into it," she laughed. Then, four years ago she was recruited by the MRTA Executive Director to become Region 5 Vice President.

"I had no idea what I was doing that first meeting," she said. But she found a mentor in former MRTA president Arleta Godwin. "She took me under her wing and was there for me when I needed advice or direction," she said.

"Everyone on the board is very helpful and welcoming, and I never felt intimidated or anything like that. They had confidence in

me, but that first year was something!"

When asked about her time with MRTA, Wendy replied, "I absolutely love it." She expressed a

desire to continue to serve in Region 5. "My number one goal this year is to visit all seven of the units in our region. There aren't too many, but some aren't close!" she said adding, "I always want to encourage them, take them a little goody."

Her favorite part of being an MRTA Regional VP is awarding MRTF grants. "Every year we have more to award – last year it was nine. And I know I don't have to personally go, but I have always wanted to be a part of it."

She feels it is important for the local MRTA units to not only advocate for retired members, but also to help support working teachers in any way they can. She reflects that, like her reading students, today's teachers sometimes need positive encouragement to keep them going.

"Our MRTA unit here in Warrensburg tries to do something for our local teachers every year. Last year we bought a bunch of apples and gave one to



Wendy and grandchildren, Emery

all our teachers with a note that said, 'We appreciate what you are doing.'"

"It's important for retirees to understand and join MRTA, to advocate for ourselves, our schools and our retirement." She also emphasized the need to help working teachers understand the value of their pension system. "I understand that teachers think it's an awful lot out of their check," she said. "But how many people can afford to put away 14.5% for retirement otherwise? And it's paid for life."

Wendy's passion for supporting Missouri educators has greater meaning when you learn that both of her children are special education teachers. Her daughter teaches Title I at a St. Louis area

preschool, and her son teaches middle school special education in Smithton, Missouri. "I admire both my kids so much for what they are doing, and I admire my friends who are still teaching for sticking with it."

Her admiration extends to her fellow MRTA Regional VPs and Executive Director Maria Walden for their service to teachers and retirees alike. "Maria takes care of everybody," she said. "She and the others in the leadership group inspire me a lot."

"Wendy's energy is so contagious. Being around her just makes a person happy. She has a great appreciation for our public schools, and affection for her students and her fellow educators," Maria said. "It shows

in her efforts to share not only information, but also positive messages and encouragement. She has made an amazing impact on education, and we are glad she is part of MRTA."

Keep dancing to your own music, Wendy. It's making a difference.



*In her spare time, Wendy also volunteers at the local hospital. She is pictured here with Thomas, the comfort dog that visits the hospital twice a month. Not pictured is his sister, Jessy. Wendy loves her job escorting Thomas and Jessy with the handlers around the hospital, bringing a little joy and hugs from staff and patients. As you can imagine, they are a big hit!*



## Looking Toward 2023 Legislative Session

As the Missouri General Assembly prepares to start the 2023 legislative session on January 4th, lawmakers have already pre-filed over 828 bills, as of December 15th.

The wide array of legislation filed so far covers everything from education to elections and pensions. Many of the bills already introduced this year contain the same language and issues as in past years.

On November 9th, the MRTA Board of Directors approved the [2023 MRTA Legislative Platform](#) which the MRTA Legislative Committee worked on earlier this fall. The 2023 Legislative Platform includes advocacy for pensions and we have added actively supporting public schools.

### LEGISLATIVE DAY

MRTA invites our members to attend MRTA Legislative Day on February 14, 2023. For those members that cannot attend in person, we will hold Legislative Blitz Day on February 14th as well. On Legislative Blitz Day we ask members to write, call, or email their legislators. It also includes videos from guest speakers on the importance of staying involved and current legislative issues.

### STAY CONNECTED

Please sign up for MRTA [Phone2Action by clicking here](#) or by texting MRTA to 52886 to stay up to date with legislative activity and MRTA Call to Actions. The 2023 legislative Session concludes on May 12th at 6:00 p.m.



*Holiday Message from MRTA Executive Director*  
*Maria Walden*

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! For many of us, this time of year may mean traveling to visit with family and friends, enjoying a traditional holiday meal with ham or turkey, eating too many Christmas cookies, watching New Year's countdown, setting New Year resolutions and reflecting on the people and things that we are grateful for this past year.

There are so many things that I am grateful for this year. My health, my family, my friends, and having the opportunity to work for such an excellent association as MRTA.

During this holiday season, I want to encourage each of you to remember the community of MRTA. We have so much to be thankful for this past year. Thank you to the staff for all your hard work this past year going through the many changes in our organization. Thank you to our Board of Directors, regional and unit leaders who I have leaned on this year. I have been amazed by all their dedication to the association and public education. I thank all MRTA members for their commitment to making a difference to our pension systems and to public education for the over 800,000 children who attend public schools in the state of Missouri.

I would also like to recognize that this time of year can be challenging for many of our members. The holiday season can bring on feelings of stress and anxiety. We know that it is during these times of stress and anxiety that we need to look out for one another the most. This is what makes MRTA such a special organization.

I would like to urge all of you to stay in touch with fellow retired and active educators. Some of our members have lost spouses and friends. Our active teachers have also had so much stress these past few years. Take breaks, reconnect with old and new friends, reach out to someone, share a cup of coffee, a text or even a smile and express thanks to all that have been a support to you throughout this year. It is the small things in life that sometimes have the greatest impact.

Wishing you the happiest of holidays and looking forward to all the amazing things MRTA and our membership will accomplish in 2023!

*Maria*



## MRTF President's Message

By Karen Miller

### JUST THE FACTS!

In 2023, Missouri Retired Teachers Association Foundation is awarding:

- Two – that's TWO – PEERS/Maggie Elder grants in each of MRTA's 14 regions. That's 28 total, up from the 20 we were able to award last year. Nine – that's NINE – Classroom grants in each of MRTA's 14 regions.
- Eleven – that's ELEVEN – MRTF grants in each of MRTA's 14 regions.
- One hundred & fifty-four – that's ONE HUNDRED & FIFTY-FOUR - \$500 MRTF grants statewide.
- Seventy-seven thousand dollars – that's SEVENTY-SEVEN THOUSAND DOLLARS – worth of MRTF grants.

BUT WE NEED YOUR HELP!! And there are multiple ways you can help RIGHT NOW!

**YEAR END ASK** - YOU can make a Year End donation to the MRTF Grant Program. Do you know an organization or company – maybe through family or friends – that make philanthropic donations this time of the year. We love those kinds of donations, too.


**AMAZON SMILE** - Are you finishing up your Christmas shopping on Amazon? Shop through Amazon Smile (type "Amazon Smile" in the search bar) and then choose MRTF as your charity and Amazon will make a small donation to MRTF. Easy and costs you \$0.



**\$10,000 RAFFLE** - Raffle tickets are available now! Need a stocking stuffer? Mail a check to the office or purchase tickets online then [click here to print a certificate](#) to add to stockings. This year we are trying to maximize the number of grants we can provide to our active teachers – we are having you print your own tickets (they are on the website, mortf.com) or [click here](#). If you still want paper copies, call the office at 877-366-6782 and Morgan will fill out tickets for you. They are \$10 per ticket or 6 tickets for \$50.

**Raffle tickets are a great stocking stuffer idea!!**

Help us help Missouri Public School employees help Missouri's kids succeed.

<p><b>MISSOURI RETIRED TEACHERS FOUNDATION</b></p> <p> <b>RAFFLE TICKET</b></p> <p><b>\$10,000 IN PRIZES</b></p> <p><b>Tickets: \$10 each or 6 for \$50</b></p> <p>A live drawing will be held on April 14, 2023.</p> <p><i>All proceeds benefit the MRTF Classroom Grant Fund.</i>  <i>Please make checks payable to MRTF.</i>  <b>MRTF 3030 DuPont Circle, Jefferson City, MO 65109</b></p> <p><b>MUST BE 18 TO PARTICIPATE. NEED NOT BE PRESENT TO WIN.</b></p> <p><small>MRTF \$10,000 Raffle prize winners are only eligible for one raffle prize per person with the exclusion of any Winning Wednesday prizes.</small></p>	<p><b>MRTF Raffle Ticket</b>  <b>\$10 ea. or 6-\$50</b></p> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Address _____</p> <p>Phone _____</p> <p>Please return by April 3, 2023</p> <p>Make checks payable to MRTF  <b>3030 DuPont Cir.</b>  <b>Jefferson City, MO 65109</b></p>
--	--



# Missouri Retired Teachers Association

## The ABC's of MRTA



## MRTA is the best insurance to protect your largest asset!

### Missouri Retired Teachers Association and Public School Personnel Membership Form

- ☐ Annual MRTA Membership.....\$44/1 Year OR \$117/3 Years  
or join via auto renewal at MRTA.org for \$39/year
- ☐ Associate Membership.....\$25  
(Anyone who is not currently drawing a public school retirement benefit.)
- ☐ New Membership ☐ Retired Teachers/Administrators
- ☐ Renewal of Membership ☐ Retired Support Staff ☐ I AM INTERESTED IN AUTOMATIC ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP DUES RENEWAL  
(Association dues are not tax deductible) Save \$5 a year

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Birth Date \_\_\_\_\_

Street, City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_ Phone (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

School District Retired From \_\_\_\_\_ Local MRTA Unit (if known) \_\_\_\_\_

Make check payable to: **MRTA**  
3030 DuPont Circle  
Jefferson City, MO 65109

Pay by Credit/Debit Card: ☐ Visa ☐ MasterCard ☐ Discover

Card Number \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

Name on Card \_\_\_\_\_ Exp. Date \_\_\_\_\_

You may join MRTA  
securely online at  
[www.mrta.org](http://www.mrta.org)  
or call the office at  
1-877-366-6782