

# MRPEA <sup>THE</sup> Guardian

Mississippi Retired Public Employees Association

## *Officers & Board Members*

President Howell C. Garner  
Vice President Becky Cade  
Treasurer Sarajeane Babin  
Secretary Peggy Brewer  
Office Manager Sarajeane Babin

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Virgil Belue  
Bill Bost  
Ralph Brewer  
Alton B. Cobb  
Lester Herrington  
Wilma R. King  
Thomas H. Loftin  
Billy B. Thames  
Anita R. Toler  
Fred M. Walker  
Wilma White  
James W. Young

## Directors (2016)

Jane Dykes  
Martha Garrett  
Mike Larson  
Ed LeGrand  
Billy H. Thames

## Directors (2015)

James Ables  
Don E. Antrim  
Richard Black  
Lucian Hill  
W. Howard Moon

## Directors (2014)

Mary Bowers  
Herbert Hargett  
Ollie Johnson  
Bill Rieves  
Randolph Strickland

## Immediate Past President

Sam Valentine

## District Directors

1. Wynona Winfield
2. Tony Byrne
- 3.
4. Hilda B. Westbrook
5. Doss Brodnax
6. Larry Bailey
7. Robert McNeil
8. Thomas E. Toney

*Dr.  
Virgil  
Belue*



*Eighteen years of  
faithful service as a  
PERS Trustee with  
perfect attendance!*

## *Tribute to Dr. Virgil Belue*

Dr. Virgil Belue has given 60 years of public service and dedication to public education both on the local level and in the state. When he retired the members of the Mississippi legislature honored him with a resolution acknowledging his work on the Board of Trustees of the Public Employees' Retirement System (PERS). He served in this trustee position with distinction for 18 years. During those 18 years of service he attended every PERS Board meeting and felt honored and privileged to do so.

Dr. Belue represented employees, members, and retirees of PERS on the board. His knowledge of the system and the legislative processes, communication skills, and commitment to a strong work ethic, made him a valuable member of the Board. During his tenure many highlights stand out as necessary and positive actions taken over the years. The Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) was guaranteed, the monetary base increase was recalculated with a new formula implemented, and efforts were made to work closely and positively with the legislature.

The number of retirees grew during the three six year terms Dr. Belue was elected and served on the PERS Board. The number of retirees increased from 43,937 to 92,977. The annual benefit for retirees increased from \$8,937.00 to \$20,466.00. The PERS fund has increased from \$8.3 billion to \$22.4 billion.

The goals, visions, and work ethic that would guide Dr. Belue in life began early in his career. After two years in the Air Force, and over time he acquired certification in education ("A", "AA" in Social Studies, "AAAA" in School Administration and School guidance and counseling}. His experience includes the Tupelo School System and the Clinton School system.

See BELUE page 4

**Contact MRPEA Office at [mrpea@bellsouth.net](mailto:mrpea@bellsouth.net)**

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## IN THIS ISSUE:

- **Tribute to Dr. Virgil Belue**
- **Message from Howell Garner, President**
- **Message from Becky Cade, Vice President**
- **Message from Sam Valentine, Past Pres.**
- **Meet your new MRPEA Board Members**
- **Annual Meeting Notes**
- **September Board Meeting Notes**
- **Future Issues**

### *Message from Howell C. Garner, President*

I'm honored to serve as your President this year. The Mississippi Public Employees Retirement System (PERS) is an extremely important part of the lives of over 384,000 who have retired or who will one day retire and draw benefits from the system. As I stated to those in attendance at the annual meeting, my commitment to the MRPEA membership is to work hard this year to uphold the purpose of this organization, which is to promote and help protect the welfare of the retirement system.

I have two particular goals that I will work to accomplish this year: to increase MRPEA membership and to improve communication with & service to our members. Those goals will not be reached without the active involvement of Board members and the overall membership. I have asked our Board members to serve on at least one of five committees that have been established to work on specific objectives toward reaching those goals. Those committees are listed elsewhere in this newsletter. Their work will be reported in future editions of *The Guardian*.

Over the past few years there has been an interest on the part of some to make changes in the state retirement system. We all realize that change is sometimes a good thing, but change for the sake of change is usually not a good thing. There have been some very productive changes made over the past several years by the PERS Board which should continue to strengthen the retirement system over the next 30-40 years. Those changes include an increased amount being paid into the system by

both the employer and the employee. Mrs. Robertson has indicated those amounts will remain stable well into the future. There has also been some adjustment of retirement age, etc. which will help protect the system into the future.

Make your plans to attend the next annual meeting, come and be heard!

### *September Board Meeting Notes*

The MRPEA Board met on Monday, Sept. 9 at Mama Hamil's in Ridgeland, Ms. Action taken included approval of the minutes of the July 25 meeting and the minutes of the annual meeting on that same date. There was consensus on the remaining dates for Board meetings for this year and the annual meeting. Those dates are highlighted in this newsletter.

Shelly Powers gave a report on behalf of Pat Robertson, Exec. Director of PERS. Her report highlighted the fact that PERS assets had grown by 13.4% this past year to over \$22 billion.

District Reports were given by District Directors.

Reports were heard from special committees that were recently formed. The Membership Committee and the Partners for Progress Committee met during the lunch hour to make plans for their work.

President Garner thanked the Board for their service and thanked the five committees for their work this year.

### *MRPEA Committees*

**Membership** chaired by Ed LeGrand

**Constitution & By-Laws** chaired by Tony Byrne

**Publications** chaired by Jane Dykes

**Legislative** chaired by Lester Herrington

**Strategic Partners** chaired by Mike Larsen

## *Message from Becky Cade Vice President*

I am excited about the opportunity to serve MRPEA as your Vice-President. Several years ago when I first started attending MRPEA annual meetings, I spoke with several individuals about my interest in getting more involved. Little did I know then that my first hands-on involvement would be as Vice-President.

In 2007 I retired from twenty-five years in state government primarily as a non-educator in the education world working in the state entities for K-12, community colleges, public broadcasting...and a university. Work ranged from oversight of individual federal grants to management of a department which included Information Technology, Human Resources and business operations.

The first couple of years in retirement brought forth various paid consulting opportunities. However, now I spend much of my time in Tupelo with my precious ninety-year-old mother or at our family farm where I fish, read, and exercise. Life is good! I am blessed to be able to give back to my community through volunteer work including, but not limited to, Mississippi University for Women's Alumni Association, The Salvation Army Women's Auxiliary, the Crossroads Ministry, and Christ United Methodist Church. I am also fortunate to serve as wife to Paul Drew Cade, and mother to Suzanna and her husband, Jeffrey Evans.

As the Executive Committee and Board work to strengthen and enhance MRPEA, I urge you to feel free to contact me through the MRPEA office with ideas, suggestions and/or concerns.

### *ANNUAL MEETING*

The annual meeting of the Mississippi Retired Professional Employees Association (MRPEA) was held on Thursday, July 25, 2013 at the Hilton on County Line Road. There was an estimated crowd of over one hundred in attendance for that meeting. Featured Speakers for the meeting were Mrs. Pat Robertson, Executive Director of PERS and Dr. Eric

Clark, Executive Director of the Mississippi Community College Board (MCCB).

Mrs. Robertson gave the audience an update on the PERS system. The good news is that the assets in the PERS system have had substantial growth this past year, with a 13.38% rate of return! Mrs. Robertson also mentioned something you rarely hear in the news - the PERS system costs the state a smaller percentage of its overall budget than it did ten years ago - less than 4% of the state budget. She gave us some very interesting facts regarding the system - you can find much of that information on our web site at [mrpea-inc.org](http://mrpea-inc.org). Just to mention a couple, the market value of unaudited assets as of July 1, 2013 was over \$22 billion, up about \$1.9 billion from last year; and the average annual benefit paid out to retirees each year is about \$20,500, including the COLA payments.

It's quite evident from Mrs. Robertson's presentation that the PERS Board and staff are doing a very good job of taking care of our interests as retirees!

Dr. Clark discussed the state retirement system from the perspective of a participant in the system, having served in several positions within state agencies, including MS legislature, Secretary of State, a college professor and as an agency head at the MCCB.

We welcomed the following individuals as new members of the MRPEA Board of Directors: Mrs. Becky Cade, who was elected to a two year term as Vice-President; Board members Billy H. Thames, Ed LeGrand, Mike Black, Jane Dykes, Martha Garrett, and Don E. Antrim. We also welcomed Dr. Randy McCoy, newly elected member of the PERS Board as a new ex-officio member of the MRPEA Board. Finally, we recognized Dr. Virgil Belue, who became a Life Member of the MRPEA Board upon his retirement from the PERS Board after 18 years of perfect attendance on the PERS Board.

BELUE (from p. 1)

In 1970, Dr. Belue was given the task of carving a new school system from the Hinds County district. As the first Superintendent, he had about a month to be ready to open the new Clinton Public School District to 2200 students. That challenge was met. Through his leadership and with competent task oriented professionals and workers, plus tremendous community pride and parental support a new district began. He remained Superintendent for 22 years.

Dr. Belue continues to be involved and give of his time in retirement. He is a man of faith and a supporter of the Public Employees' Retirement System (PERS). He is active in the Mississippi Retired Public Employees' Association (MRPEA), the Retired Education Personnel of Mississippi (REPM), Clinton Association of Retired Educators, and the Clinton Chamber of Commerce. A great joy to him and his wife, Aline, is to have the freedom and the time to travel to see the grandchildren and other family members. He uses the Health complex in Clinton regularly. Dr. Belue is a quiet, well organized, and highly respected retired educator.

### *Message from Sam Valentine, Past President*

We have often heard it said that hind sight is 20-20. Such is the case after serving as President of MRPEA. Looking back I can see many things that we needed to accomplish that we were not able to complete while at the same time I am proud to say that we were able to make improvements in our association while strengthening the unity of our membership. We had no way to anticipate the study committee appointed by our former governor prior to my taking office nor did we know what recommendations that they might deliver to the State Legislature. We did however find out that retirees can unite their message and be heard by the same legislature that the Governor gave his recommendations to. Through this process I learned an important lesson for all of us as retirees. That lesson is that the same legislature

that passed our retirement system many years ago has been replaced by a new and different legislature. For this reason we as retirees must strengthen our organization and our communication efforts to address the proponents of change that exist in both chambers.

We now recognize the power of the internet and I am proud to say that we have started the process of taking advantage of this resource and our efforts will be continued and improved on with the leadership of our new president. The ability to communicate instantly with our membership and trigger their communication to the legislature on issues related to PERS is a must for years to come. At the same time we will continue to have in place a method for communicating with our members who still do not have internet access. In addition we have a new and improved website that is available to both keep our members informed and hopefully attract new members as they become new retirees.

As we look forward I know that our new slate of offices will focus on the growth of MRPEA. Our challenges in protecting PERS are far from over and we all must work together to promote our associations growth. As your outgoing president I want to encourage everyone to ask your fellow retirees to become a member and stay informed about legislation and the protection and safety of PERS. We also need to maintain a line of communication with our respective legislators and let them know how important PERS is to our families and to our state.

In closing I want to encourage all of our members to work with and support our new officers as we prepare for the 2014 session of the Mississippi Legislature and to support the growth of MRPEA to include all members of PERS.

### **DATES FOR YOUR CALENDER**

#### **QUARTERLY BOARD MEETINGS: 10 AM**

**November 11, 2013  
Mama Hamil's in Ridgeland, Ms**

**February 10, 2014  
Mama Hamil's in Ridgeland, Ms**

**May 12, 2014  
Hilton on County Line Road, Jackson, Ms**

## Meet your new MRPEA Board members

Six new MRPEA Board members began their term of office on July 25 after the annual meeting. We are proud to have these individuals join the MRPEA Board – they all bring great experience in various areas of public service, and each of them is dedicated to the welfare of the state retirement system. We will feature two of these new members in each issue of *The Guardian* this year. Jane Dykes & Richard Black are featured below.

### Jane Dykes

Jane Bell Dykes is a retired educator with 33 years of experience in the public schools of Mississippi. She was a high school English teacher for 17 years before becoming a school counselor for sixteen years.

Jane served as president of the Mississippi Counseling Association and continues to serve on the Executive Board of MCA. She represents school counselors on the Mississippi Association of School Administrators Board and serves as secretary for the Child Evangelism Fellowship of Mississippi Board. Jane is a member of the First Baptist Church of Madison where she leads grief support groups and participates in the mission outreach of FBC Madison.

She was married to the former Tommy Del Dykes and is the mother and grandmother of three children and five grandchildren.

Jane resides in Madison, Mississippi.



## Future Issues of *The Guardian*

You will receive *The Guardian* during this year to keep you apprised of issues which affect the state retirement system. *The Guardian* is one way of communicating with you, but I encourage you to go to the MRPEA web site at [mrpea-inc.org](http://mrpea-inc.org) to get important information about MRPEA. We will try to keep the very latest information on the web site.

Please let me know how I or the other members of the MRPEA Board may be of assistance to you this year.

### Richard Black

Richard “Mike” Black from Oxford, Mississippi is a new Director on the Board of the Mississippi Retired Public Employees Association. He takes the place that was once held by Sam Carollo from Grenada who passed away in January of 2013.

Mr. Black has worked for 35 years in public service in law enforcement and the Department of Mental Health, last serving as Assistant Director of the North Mississippi Regional Center in Oxford. He is currently Human Resources Director for a Regional Community Mental Health Center and also operates a private investigative consulting firm primarily serving attorneys.

He is a graduate of the University of Mississippi where he earned a Bachelor of Public Administration Degree. He continued his Education at Texas A & M University where he worked on Texas Law Enforcement and the Security Training Division.

Richard’s wife Sherry retired after 30 years in banking. They have one daughter, Jennifer, who is married to Logan Ventre, a pilot in the USAF. They currently reside in North Carolina.

## ANNUAL MEETING

MAY 12, 2014 @1 PM

Hilton Hotel on County Line Road



P.O. Box 5580  
Brandon, MS 39047

Prsrt Std  
US Postage  
PAID  
Permit No. 670  
Jackson MS

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The logo for the membership application features the same stylized green leaf icon as the main MRPEA logo, followed by the text "MRPEA Membership Application" in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

## MRPEA Membership Application

Annual Rate \$15

Life Single Rate \$250

Please PRINT the following information:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ County: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Mail this form WITH check payable to MRPEA.  
Send to P.O. Box 5580; Brandon, MS 39047-5580.

For questions, call 601.919.0670. E-mail us at [MRPEA@bellsouth.net](mailto:MRPEA@bellsouth.net).