

The Voice



A Newsletter for Yakima County School Retirees

Peter Diedrick: WSSRA Executive Director ADVOCATING FOR WSSRA MEMBERS



Peter Diedrick
Executive Director, WSSRA

Program arranged by October President of the Month, Millie Stenehjelm

Peter Diedrick, WSSRA Executive Director, will be our program for Monday, October 5, 2026. Peter spent many years as our Legislative Director. Many of the benefits we enjoy today are due to his hard work and dedication on behalf of all our members, active and retired.

As our Executive Director, he continues to work hard advocating for the benefits of all members of WSSRA retired and still actively working in Washington State Schools.

All these experiences help him find his way through the mythical hallways and magical workings of legislating, representing, governing, voting, meeting and greeting!

Peter is married and the father of three young children. He lives in Lacey.



Millie Stenehjelm
October President

Protect the PEBB Medicare Benefit

By Emmett Mills

WHAT IS THE PEBB MEDICARE BENEFIT?

The PEBB Medicare Benefit provides essential support to Washington State's retired teachers, school employees, and state employees. When career public servants enroll in Medicare plans offered through the Public Employees Benefits Board (PEBB), the benefit is applied to lower their out-of-pocket monthly plan premiums. It currently pays 50% of the total monthly premium up to \$183 per month, acting as a lifeline to keep health coverage affordable. If you are enrolled in a PEBB Medicare plan, you are automatically receiving it. Unlike Pensions, this Benefit is Not Guaranteed. Washington State is not contractually obligated to provide the PEBB Medicare Benefit. This means the legislature has the full authority to reduce, alter, or eliminate the benefit during any budget cycle. It survives entirely on the political will of lawmakers. If the benefit were totally eliminated, subscribers would see their monthly premiums either double or increase by \$183 per month.



ON THE CHOPPING BLOCK

Because this benefit is vulnerable, it becomes an immediate target whenever the state faces financial strain. We have already seen this playbook put into action.

Slashed in 2011 – In 2011, the Legislature made wide cuts to public sector retiree benefits, including eliminating the annual COLA for TRS 1 and PERS 1 retirees. That year, they also reduced the PEBB Medicare Benefit cap from \$183 to \$150 per month. It took eight years of work for retiree groups to restore it to \$183 per month.

A Close Call in 2026 – During the 2026 legislative session, facing immediate revenue pressures, the Washington State Senate passed a budget that would have reduced the \$183 funding cap to \$150 per month. This would have increased annual health insurance costs by nearly \$400 for most retirees who purchase Medicare plans through PEBB.

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THE VOICE

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Mini-grants

Linda Sumner
509 248 1875

GENERAL MEETING

When: Monday, October 5, 2026

Where: Englewood Christian Church, 511 N 44th Avenue, Yakima

Fellowship: 12:30pm–1:00pm

Coffee, Tea and Refreshments

Program: WSSRA Executive Director - Peter Diedrick

The following people have signed up to bring the following:

FOOD

1. Millie Stenehjerm 509 966 3409
2. Paul Schafer 509 453 2606
3. Sandy Gavin 509 952 9855
4. Linda Sumner 509 248 1875
5. Jan Saxon 509 658 1527

DRAWING PRIZES

1. Debbie Dougherty 509 594 5270
2. Larry Scholl 509 674 9352
3. Sandy Gavin 509 952 9855
4. Nick Schultz 509 966 9341
5. Sue Ryan-Osegueda 509 952 3295

**If you want your issue of
'The Voice' delivered by e-mail,
YOU must be certain that Sandy Gavin
has your current email address:
sandyg1948@gmail.com**

**The newsletter will come from
newsletter@yakima-county-sra.org**



**Make sure we
have your
proper email**

If you have changed your email address in the last year or you are not receiving your newsletter by your preferred method, please let Sandy Gavin know ASAP. Thanks!

Sandy Gavin, sandyg1948@gmail.com

Opinions expressed in **The Voice** are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the view of the YCSRA Board or the editor.

Editorial contributions and articles as well as ideas for articles are welcome. The deadline is the 12th of each month.

Send information to:

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Design Heather Payne | 509 901 8733
heather@payne-design.com

WE SEND OUT WSSRA GREETINGS!

Let's support our members with get well wishes, condolences, thank yous, congratulations, thinking of you and more. Email or call me with names and I'll get the card(s) sent out for you. Email: cmstenehjerm@msn.com or 509-966-3409. Leave a message if no one answers.

~ Millie Stenehjerm



MINI-GRANT APPLICATION

As a member of Yakima County School Retirees you are eligible to apply for a mini-grant to use with the children of your school. These grants are intended for special projects or classroom materials. **Grants up to \$500 are available.** It is a token of our appreciation for all that you do to help students achieve their potential. This year we have **\$12,000** to award. So let us help you with that great idea you have for your class or school.

NOTE: Grant Applications must be received by **Thursday, November 12, 2026.** Applicants receiving grants will be notified by December 14, 2026.

If you receive a mini-grant, we ask that you plan to share with us a written description along with pictures of how this mini-grant benefited your students. This will become part of our May 3, 2027 general meeting.

Please contact Linda at 509 952-2368 with any questions and submit your completed application to:

Linda Sumner, YCSRA Mini-Grants
2607 Clinton Way
Yakima, WA 98902

Please complete the application below and attach your type-written grant details. Please make it brief and specific.



KEEP FOR YOUR RECORDS
RETURN TO LINDA SUMNER

MINI-GRANT APPLICATION

Applicant Name _____

Grant Title _____

Amount Requested \$ _____ Number of Students Served _____

Program Description – Please attach a separate type-written letter outlining Grant details.

Applicant Home Phone _____

Applicant Email _____

School Name _____

School Address _____

School Phone _____

Supervisor/Principal Name _____

Supervisor/Principal Signature _____

Your Signature _____

Please return this completed application with your grant description to: Linda Sumner, YCSRA Mini-Grants, 2607 Clinton Way, Yakima, WA 98902. The completed application must be received by November 12, 2026.



YCSRA MEMBERSHIP: SUPPORTING EDUCATION

INVITE A SCHOOL EMPLOYEE FRIEND TO JOIN TODAY!

By Patrick Walsh, Membership Chairperson

SUPPORTING EDUCATION

Even though most of us are retired, I believe that in September many of us become haunted by a feeling that we should be returning to our school buildings to get on with the business of educating our young citizens. But rest easy - I am confident that our working YCSRA members and their colleagues are doing a fantastic job without us. And in addition, we are continuing to support education through our membership dues. In the past school year, we provided \$11,977 towards 26 separate mini-grants to local schools. Through the Washington State School Retirees' Foundation, we have helped provide 44 scholarships to college students who are pursuing a career in education.

COMMUNICATION WITH STATE LEGISLATURE

Through frequent communication with our state legislators this past year, the Association has managed to play an essential roll in maintaining a cost-of-living increase for Plan 1 retirees, and maintained reductions in Medicare retirement premiums. All this in a tight budget year.

YCSRA MEMBERSHIP

I am saddened by the fact that the membership in the Yakima County Association has been declining since the pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, the local association (Yakima County) maintained over 1,600 members. As of June 1st, 2026 the membership was 1,463.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

We will continue to increase membership by talking to school staff in schools that win mini-grants and by other contacts. You can help by talking to your friends about this important association. Both the State Association (WSSRA) and the Yakima County Association (YCSRA) have easy to find websites. People can join on the website, or contact me at: patwalsh057@gmail.com or 509-391-4906. As you know, dues are \$7 per month or \$84 per year. No contracts. Thank you.



Patrick Walsh
Membership Chairperson

Special Request for T-Shirts

From Russ & Donna Scofield's daughter Katy



My sister is making a T-shirt quilt for our dad. We are looking for Franklin, Roosevelt and/or Yakima School District T-shirts that someone could donate. We just need one of each. The T-shirt size doesn't matter and I'd be willing to pick up in the Yakima area. If you have a T-shirt you would be willing to donate, please call: 509-406-2614 or email: katyscofield1@gmail.com

Green Bean and Hamburger Casserole

Recipe from the Kitchen of Millie Stenehjelm

Ingredients

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1lb. of hamburger | 1 box Tater Tots |
| 1 small onion-chopped | 1 can cream of chicken soup |
| 1 can drained green beans | 1 cup milk |

Directions

1. Brown hamburger & chopped onion: season to taste. Add the browned hamburger to a casserole dish.
2. On top of this, lay the drained green beans, then cover with tater tots.
3. Mix the cream of chicken soup and milk and pour over all ingredients.
4. Bake at 350 degrees for one hour until golden brown.



HEALTH MATTERS

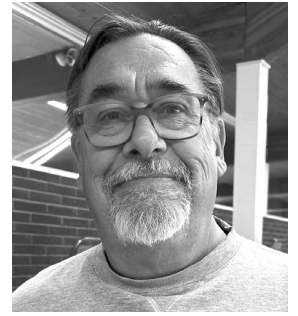
By John Osegueda

I met my friend Kevin when we were 14 year old freshmen at Moreau Catholic High School in 1974. We have been a part of each others lives ever since. Next month we will be celebrating our 50 year high school reunion. I met my wife Sue in 1986 when a friend of mine asked me to pick up her new roommate and bring her to a wine tasting party at my house. Despite having the chutzpah to have me put up the top on my Cabriolet as not to mess up her hair, she also brought a \$2.99 non-vintage wine to the affair. No Bueno. We have been together for 40 years and have made countless memories together and raised a family that are the joys of our lives. Both these people have contributed many important pieces to my life's puzzle. But lately I have to confess I have been spending a lot of time with two new friends. We met online and in some ways I have come to rely on them to figure out some of life's hidden mysteries. Siri and Alexa have become one of my go-to's to find out things like Warren Hardin's middle name (Gamaliel) and how much is a butt-load is (126 gallons.) If you are like me there is no avoiding the increase of AI in our lives. I am sure there is much about these we have to learn before we put unconditional trust in their ability to help make important decisions, like health issues. Today's health care consumers are much more informed and thus empowered. Meeting their demands require answers that are convenient and precise. AI has the data driven analysis and data driven decision making capabilities that can deliver better in depth care and health outcomes.

Healthcare systems are being confronted with the reality that as people get older their health declines. One estimate states that 95% of individuals over 60 have at least one chronic illness and nearly 80% have two or more. The care they need should be personalized and readily available. AI driven models can enhance early disease detection and optimize decision making. Generally AI seems to have to potential to improve overall healthcare to empower seniors to maintain their independence and quality of life for as long as possible, but for many the concept seems difficult to engage and fully trust. I don't think we will ever go back to visiting Marcus Welby, and

the simpler times that truly weren't "the good old days" medically speaking.

I am not saying that this is the only avenue open to seniors. I am merely knocking on the door for you to investigate the future of medicine. I think I can assure you that your health care provider and insurance company are doing so. Here are a few Guides and resources I found that you might find helpful:



John Osegueda

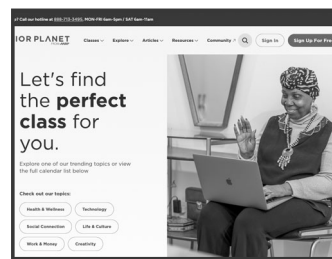


Senior Planet AI Guide for Older Adults

Published by Older Adults Technology Services (OATS).

A guide to introduce older adults to AI, how it works, and how to safely use it in your daily life.

<https://oats.org/oats-publishes-ai-for-older-adults-guide/>



Senior Planet Free AI Classes

From AARP includes classes designed to help demystify AI for seniors.

<https://seniorplanet.org>

– Exploring Older Adults Perspectives and Acceptance of AI

– Artificial Intelligence in Elderly Care

Both resources share insights to provide comfort levels, trust and privacy. I hope this is of help as we move into a new age of healthcare that meets our physical and emotional needs.

Remember open enrollment is right around the corner for PEBB and open market plans. You might find you need to tweak your plan a bit or make a complete change, and this is the only time to do so.

For most PEBB Medicare couples, it would have been a nearly \$800 annual increase. We were able to prevent this cut from happening, but it was a very close call.

Trouble Ahead in 2027 – Washington State is projected to face another highly difficult fiscal situation in 2027. The legislature will likely be forced to make more budget cuts. The PEBB Medicare Benefit will be at extreme risk of reduction or complete elimination as lawmakers look for large funding pools to balance the budget.

EDUCATE LEGISLATORS BEFORE THE 2027 SESSION

Lawmakers must understand the impact this benefit has on your life. Use these talking points:

Don't Make PEBB Plans Unaffordable – We depend on our high-quality PEBB medical plans to manage our health as we age. If the legislature reduces this benefit, our monthly premiums will skyrocket. PEBB plans will become unaffordable, forcing seniors into inferior plans with high deductibles and restricted doctor networks.

A Deficit in 2027 Cannot Be Solved by Hurting Seniors

We know a difficult fiscal situation is projected for 2027. However, you cannot balance the state budget on the backs

of fixed-income retirees who have zero ability to re-enter the workforce or absorb sudden monthly premium spikes. Many public sector retirees, especially those in the TRS1 and PERS1 pension systems, are already struggling with the high cost of living in our state.



Emmett Mills

Washington State's Retiree Health Benefits Are NOT Unusually Generous

– Some lawmakers have been told that Washington has incredibly generous retiree health benefits compared to other states. This simply is not true. The following states offer Medicare plans with employer support exceeding \$183 per month: KY, LA, SC, TX, AK, NC, MI, NH, NM, ME, DE, CA, HI, MA, MD, VT.

Ask Them – Will you promise to oppose cuts to the PEBB Medicare Benefit?

Questions? Contact Emmett Mills with the Washington State School Retirees' Association:

emmett@wssra.org – (360) 413-5496 ext. 2

PROTECT THE PEBB MEDICARE BENEFIT



**Yakima County
School Retirees' Association
4708 Fechter Rd
Yakima, WA 98908**

