

2021 Scholarship Winners

The on-going Covid-19 pandemic did not stop MRSPA's Scholarship Committee from awarding three \$2,000 scholarships to deserving public school employees in 2021. We were prevented from awarding the scholarships in person, but the recipients are still very grateful to our generous MRSPA members for helping them pursue their dreams and goals.

Applications were completed in January and scored in early February. Winners were notified of their selection in late February. Selected from 124 applicants, the winners are William "Brad" Distad, Washington County Public Schools; Melissa Martinez, Montgomery County Public Schools; and Alicia Benton, Somerset County Public Schools.

These important scholarships would not be possible without the donations of MRSPA members and friends like you! Please see [page 5](#) in this news-letter for a form and information on how you can support the MRSPA Fund and future scholarship winners.

Brad Distad is a substitute teacher in Washington County with degrees in geography and theater. He is currently working toward his certification in social studies and theater with an endorsement in math. With the help of our scholarship, Brad plans to complete his Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership at Notre Dame of Maryland



University later this year.

Melissa Martinez is a paraeducator with a bachelor's degree. She works at Damascus Elementary School in Montgomery County. Melissa is studying at University of Maryland University College working toward certification as an ESOL teacher. Ms. Martinez hopes to bridge the gap between parents, their children, and the school as she builds positive relationships with her students and their families.



Alicia Benton is a special education generalist/paraeducator with a bachelor's degree in interdisciplinary studies. She is currently working in the Somerset County Schools central office. She is working toward a Master's in Teaching from Liberty University. Ms. Benton hopes to become a special education teacher and make an impact on her students upon completion of her degree.



Congratulations to our 2021 winners!

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by George D. Denny, Jr.



By the time you read this, schools across Maryland will have been open for about a month--or not. Excited students will have been enjoying in-person learning with their teachers and peers in classrooms--or not. School activities will have been operating at full tilt--or not. Such is the challenge of having to write in early September about what things will be like in early October.

What I can tell you with certainty, however, is that your local association members and officers have been hard at work serving your community and your schools in many ways. Community Service projects are underway across the state, providing needed resources to families, students, and schools. Local association meetings are being held both in-person and via Zoom. I have been pleased to have attended several in-person association meetings and to have seen the excitement and enthusiasm of those other attendees who were there.

Likewise, MRSPA Board members, committees and staff continue to conduct association business in an organized, dedicated, successful manner. The Legislative Committee has already drawn up our priorities for the Maryland General Assembly session beginning in January. Plans are underway for the May 2022 Annual Business Meeting. All other State committees are on task and on target to make this another successful year for MRSPA and all our locals.

MRSPA now has the capability of having in-person or a hybrid of virtual and in-person meetings at our Odenton

MRSPA News

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office. This new technology will allow individuals to select the type of meeting they feel most comfortable attending.

Through all of this, MRSPA is mindful that we must not lose sight of our goal as an association, which is to protect the hard-earned pensions of our members. At the State level we continue to monitor legislation in Annapolis that might affect us in any way. It is at the local level that we need to have you help protect the retirement health benefits offered to you by your city, county and/or school system.

Meanwhile, fall is upon us. As Albert Camus opined, "Autumn shows us how beautiful it is to let things go." Take time to enjoy the beauty of nature and let go of the things that do not help you.

Best wishes and stay safe.

Why wait for the mail?

Receive MRSPA News up to two weeks earlier with email delivery!

If you'd like to receive MRSPA News via email, just let us know, and we'll add you to our electronic distribution list. You'll receive the publication faster AND help us reduce printing costs. Email your request to: mrspa@mrspa.org and put "Newsletter by Email" in the subject line of the email and please include your full name and your email address.



From the

Executive Director Wanda Ruffo Twigg



Where Were You When?

One of my earliest childhood memories is of a "where were you when" moment. My mother was standing on a chair cleaning the top of a kitchen cupboard listening to the radio and crying. I didn't know why she was crying, but I knew something terrible had happened. I figured it out days later when we watched the TV coverage of John F. Kennedy's funeral. I distinctly remember seeing young John, Jr., who was about my age at the time, standing there saluting. I can picture it to this day. I didn't understand why I was sad, but I was.

As the years passed, there were other "where were you when" moments. Some tragic, some joyous. All memorable, important, and historic in their own right. And then, it was September 11, 2001.

I was driving to work on a crystal clear, blue sky day when I heard on the radio that a plane had struck the World Trade Center. My first thought was of a little Cessna hitting that big building, wondering how that could possibly have happened, and if many people were hurt. I was not prepared for the trauma that was actually befalling our country and countrymen or the disbelief, sadness, and loss I would feel.

There was no TV in the office, so I went across the parking lot to a rental furniture store to see what was happening. The Navy base in town went into lock down, as did the local schools. I started trying to call my husband who was at BWI for a flight to Maine for work and to check in with my sister whose husband worked at the Pentagon. The roads and phone lines were jammed. I never did get either of them on the phone, so I was very relieved when my husband finally made it home that evening, and when I got confirmation that my brother-in-law was safe.

Thousands of other families never felt that relief. They lived unspeakable tragedy and loss. As the country grieved with them, we vowed to remain vigilant and resilient, to fight back with all our hearts, and to never forget.

Twenty years have passed since that September day. Beautiful and fitting memorials now mark the hallowed grounds where so many perished and so many worked to rescue survivors. As this anniversary comes and goes, let us stop to reflect upon and honor the people, events, and feelings of that fall day that began so beautifully, then in an instant, changed the course of world history. "Where were you when?"

Vision Statement

The Maryland Retired School Personnel Association inspires the dedication, commitment, skills and abilities of its members in service to fellow retirees and the entire community in an ever-changing world.

Mission Statement

The Maryland Retired School Personnel Association is a nonprofit organization comprised of retired school system personnel. It serves as an advocate for retirees and provides expanding services to members, empowering them to enrich the quality of their lives. The Organization is dedicated to excellence in education and life-long learning. It promotes community service by its members through a myriad of volunteer activities.

Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion

We, the Maryland Retired School Personnel Association, are evolving to reflect the goals and aspirations of a contemporary organization. Through our shared values, we create an environment where all members are included, respected, and appreciated.

Membership and Community Service Awards

During the Annual Business Meeting each May, MRSPA recognizes our local associations for increasing their membership and for their community service projects. This year, we also honored many local association projects in several editions of the *MRSPA News* highlighting the wonderful volunteerism of our members. We plan to continue to highlight local association volunteer efforts in future editions, as well. Individual members are also recognized annually for their contributions to the community. This year, the MRSPA Membership and Community Service Committees, under the leadership of Leslie Heiderman Schell and Trish Bendler respectively,



presented the following awards during the virtual Annual Business Meeting on May 12. Congratulations!

Membership Awards are given based on the number of members in a local in three categories. Small locals have up to 199 members, medium locals have between 200 and 899 members, and large locals have 900 or more members. We sincerely thank all our local associations for their efforts in recruiting new members, even in this most difficult of years! The 2021 winners are as follows:

Largest Numerical Increase

Small: Queen Anne's County – 11

Medium: Frederick County – 40

Large: Montgomery County - 92

Largest Percentage Increase

Small: Garrett County - 4.82%

Medium: St. Mary's County - 1.15%

Our **Outstanding Individual Community Service Award** winner is Oretha Bridgwaters-Simms. A member of Prince George's Public School Retirees Association, Ms. Bridgwaters-Simms serves her community selflessly and tirelessly. She is recognized for stepping up to help her neighbors before and during the pandemic. Before the pandemic, Oretha organized a monthly luncheon for retired residents to extend friendship, support, and share community resources and information. During the pandemic, she helped 23 of the retirees make appointments and transported them to receive their vaccinations. MRSPA congratulates Oretha for this and for her other local outstanding service to her community!



Oretha Bridgwaters-Simms

Judy Davis won **Honorable Mention** for her extensive volunteer work. She is a member of the Wicomico Retired Educational Personnel who donates 10 hours each week to volunteering. Ms. Davis is recognized for serving as the Community Service Committee Chair, for successfully coordinating the donation of more than \$10,000 to the United Way for several years running, for coordinating Bell Ringers for the Salvation Army, and for collecting donations for the Maryland Food Bank. Judy is part of the Dress Ministry which is a tri-state group of seamstresses who make children's clothing out of pillowcases which are donated to children in Kenya. Judy is commended for these actions and all the other volunteer work she does in her community.



Judy Davis

News from MSRPS



The August 10, 2021 press release from the Maryland State Retirement and Pension System (MSRPS) announced historic earnings on investments for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2021. The portfolio returned a record-setting 26.7%, net of fees, far exceeding the System's 7.40% assumed actuarial rate of return. The fund's performance raised the System's assets to \$67.9 billion, an increase of \$13.3 billion over the prior fiscal year. "The performance of the fund over 10-year, 5-year, and 1-year periods are all above the 7.4% return assumption at 8.2%, 10.7%, 11.8% and 26.7%, respectively," according to the release.

"It was an extraordinary year for the performance of System assets, the best in 35 years," said Andrew C. Palmer, Chief Investment Officer. "The Board of Trustees has carefully designed a well-balanced portfolio of investments to meet its obligations to beneficiaries," said State Treasurer Nancy K. Kopp, Chair of the Maryland State Retirement and Pension System Board of Trustees. "The last two years have demonstrated the overall effectiveness of the Board's investment strategy, preserving value during the volatile market environment resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic and fully participating in the strong growth as economies rebounded."

A press release on August 11, 2021, announced a reduction in the actuarial assumed rate of return on its investments from 7.40% to 6.80%. This decision by the Board of Trustees will become effective July 1, 2022. "The Board is committed to improving the strength of our retirement System and sustaining the State's promise of a secure retirement for its members," noted State Treasurer Nancy K. Kopp. "The Board has taken this action in recognition of ongoing changes in the financial markets, even as the System continues to achieve the investment returns required over the long term." The Board based its decision upon analysis by Gabriel Roeder Smith & Company, its actuary.

MRSPA Fund Donations

The MRSPA Community Service and Scholarship Committees provide tremendous support to students and staff in schools across Maryland. In the past, funds for these scholarships and mini-grants were partially obtained through in-person sale of raffle tickets statewide. Last year, we sold raffle tickets via this newsletter and via local newsletters with great success. This year we are again seeking **donations** to the *MRSPA Fund* to continue our work. All donations are tax deductible and come with our thanks and appreciation!

To show our appreciation, your name will be entered into a drawing upon receipt of your donation. Donations of \$10 will earn 1 raffle ticket, and donations of \$25 will earn 3 raffle tickets incrementally. MRSPA staff will write your name on the correct number of tickets when we receive your check. The drawing will take place at the May 2022 Annual Business Meeting, whether held in person or virtually. You can win the \$300 cash first prize, a Maryland themed basket valued at \$150 second prize, or one of 5 third place themed baskets valued at \$75: Cooking, Spa, Wine Lover, Movie Night, and Sports Lover. Out-of-state basket winners will receive gift cards in lieu of basket contents.

Entering the drawing is fun and easy!

1. Make your **check payable** to "**The Community Foundation of Frederick County**"
2. Write **MRSPA Fund Donation** on the FOR line
3. Date and **sign** your check
4. **Mail** check and completed form to:
MRSPA
8379 Piney Orchard Parkway, Suite A,
Odenton, MD 21113

Due by March 22, 2022

**Please, include the form below with your donation.
Receipts will be sent via email or US Mail.**



MRSPA Fund Donation

Your Name: _____

Your Address: _____

Home Phone: _____ Cell Phone: _____

Email: _____

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New Membership Cards are Coming Watch Out!

If your US Mail is like ours, you get way more junk mail than anything else. Beginning in early November, MRSPA will be distributing **NEW plastic membership cards to ALL members** who have paid their 2022 dues.

These new plastic cards are permanent, so do not throw them away at the end of the year! They are plastic so they can be kept nicely in your wallet or purse for several years.

Please watch your US Mail for the new card in November! Don't mistake it for junk mail and throw it away! We won't be able to produce multiple cards for multiple people.

If you have moved recently or plan to move between now and early November, please call or email the office with an accurate mailing address. Contact us at 410-551-1517 or at mrspa@mrspa.org as soon as possible. We want to ensure that each card arrives at a member home correctly!

We hope you love your new card!



NAEP IS HIRING

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is seeking proctors for digitally based assessments in schools between January 24 and March 4, 2022, when work is available. NAEP offers paid training (during January), hourly wages paid weekly, and mileage reimbursement for local driving. This is a part-time, temporary position.

Visit <http://www.WorkNAEP.com> and provide your contact information! We'll send you an email invitation to apply for the position this summer.

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MRSPA CALENDAR

- October 7 MD Teacher of the Year Award Gala
Maryland Public TV Special
- October 19 - 22 NRTA Advocacy Conference
Via Zoom
- November 4 AARP MD Andrus Awards
Via Zoom
- November 25-26.... Thanksgiving Holiday
MRSPA Office Closed
- December 8 Board of Directors Meeting
TBD



**MRSPA TRIPS AND TRAVEL
 2021-2022**



Texas Cowboy Country, October 16 - 24, 2021 (Mayflower Tours), Contact Debbie Martinez at (810) 797-5710 or (630) 673-0773 or Debbie@mayflowercruisesandtours.com.

Greece: A Land of Gods & Heroes, November 6 - 14, 2021 (Aventura World), Contact Dora Ferreira at (201) 228-5266 or reservations@aventuraworld.com.

Santa Fe Holiday, November 28 – December 3, 2021 (Collette), Contact Leigh Ann Keller at Action Travel at (301) 843-0887 or admin@actiontraveltours.com.

Backroads of Iberia: Spain and Portugal, April 2 – 17, 2022, Overseas Adventure Travel (Grand Circle Travel Small Group), Contact Amanda Turrell at (386) 597-1380 or (386) 290-2997 or ATurrell@oattravel.com **Code: G2-28192.**

Holland and Belgium Springtime River Cruise, April 2022 (Collette), Contact Leigh Ann Keller at Action Travel at (301) 843-0887 or admin@actiontraveltours.com.

America's Music Cities Featuring Nashville, Memphis, & New Orleans, May 20 – 27, 2022 (Mayflower Tours), Contact Debbie Martinez at (810) 797-5710 or (630) 673-0773 or Debbie@mayflowercruisesandtours.com.

Oberammergau and Passion Play, May 22 – 31, 2022 (Collette), Contact Leigh Ann Keller at Action Travel at (301) 843-0887 or admin@actiontraveltours.com.

Alaska Cruise/Tour, July 8 – 20, 2022 (Cruises Plus), Contact Judy Warsaw at (410) 494-1414 or judycruisesplus@aol.com.

Mackinac Island, September/October 2022 (Collette), Contact Leigh Ann Keller at Action Travel at (301) 843-0887 or admin@actiontraveltours.com.

Check our website at www.mrspa.org, click [Travel](#) to locate more information on any of the scheduled trips.

All MRSPA trips are open to MRSPA members, family, and friends. Please use **Code: 28192 anytime** you travel with Grand Circle Tours and Overseas Adventure Travel to access a special deal for you and MRSPA, even if it's not an MRSPA sponsored trip.