

Locally Sourced, Organically Grown

Recognizing the need to connect with retirees, the Burnsville Education Association (BEA), an affiliate of Education Minnesota, initiated a retired member position on its Executive Board in the late 1990's. However, the retiree position on the board often went unfilled. Many retirees often feel disconnected from the local union once they retire. Having served many positions on the BEA and for Education Minnesota, we, Paul Berge and Wes Hanna, both recently retired, decided to ask the current BEA president, Wendy Drugge, to be appointed to the vacant Executive Board Retired position in June of 2015. We aimed to organize annual events, engage politically, conduct community outreach, address senior issues, and offer the historical perspective from retired teachers. We were enthusiastically welcomed by Wendy and the Executive Board. Wendy took the time to meet with us, asked for our input in bargaining issues, and offered to support our organizing initiatives.

We are in the ongoing process of finding new ways to enhance and grow our membership and attendance at our events. It becomes more difficult as our retired population ages and we find that what appealed to the group a decade ago may not suffice today. It is challenging but we feel it is vitally important to have an engaged retired association. You can read our story of birth and growth below.

Our first step was to plan a Fall Social to begin to locate and organize our retirees. The BEA paid the costs of the mailings and the social itself. We attracted a group of about seventy-five retirees using mailing lists that went back ten years and person-to-person contacts. Attendees were pleased to be a part of our first social and were anxious for knowledge of the current state-of-affairs in ISD 191 (the Burnsville School District.) We attempted to collect email addresses at that function with only limited success.

Upon review with the BEA Executive Board and President we decided that we needed to continue organizing. The BEA did not have additional budgeted funds available, so a Spring Social was scheduled with an associated fee. The same mailing list, though updated, was used along with the email addresses we had gathered.

At the BEA Retired Spring Social, we conducted a brief survey and collected more email addresses. Out of forty attendees, we formed a Steering Committee. Most survey respondents preferred social events, though many were also interested in political and community activities.

In 2017 we sought to affiliate with Education Minnesota Retired.

- We went through the process of applying for a newly forming locals' grant.
- Writing and approving our constitution and by-laws.
- After presenting our constitution to the Local Chapter Committee and receiving approval from both the committee and governing board, we affiliated with Education Minnesota Retired.
- We then elected officers at our fall business meeting that year.

Education Minnesota Retired's grant for newly forming locals helped us continue from there and it has become a tradition for us to hold a spring and fall event with a business meeting attached

to one and a variety of speakers and invited guests centered on issues of interest to retirees. Many of the events were focused on pensions and political/legislative activity.

Our local members want to reconnect with former colleagues, get district news, and hear from relevant speakers. Previous meetings have included BEA President Wendy Drugge, the TRA Executive Director, the Burnsville Schools Superintendent, Congressional Representative Angie Craig, Education Minnesota Retired President Wes Tessman, and others.

We have had two especially well-received events.

Our local, Burnsville Area Retired Teachers (BART), organized a joint social/informational event with our active organization, BEA. Retired teachers got the opportunity to socialize and interact with some of their former colleagues, still active, and meet some younger versions of themselves. It was clear to us that the active members were just as excited to spend time with the retirees as we were to have this time to connect with them. Topics shared, in small groups and one-to-one reminiscences, were comparisons and contrasts to styles, pedagogy, schedules, and students, now and then. Retirees were eager to share their knowledge, anecdotes, and empathy for the struggles their former colleagues have and are facing. We were happy to share in the frustrations and triumphs of our former colleagues and share the rewards of retirement after a rewarding and philanthropic career. It was both entertaining and enlightening for all.

In a later event, BART held its fall social and business meeting on October 1, 2024, shortly before the Presidential election. We were privileged that the outgoing president of Education Minnesota, Denise Specht, accepted our invitation to attend and keynote our gathering. It evolved into a much more consequential event. Denise informed us that the presidents of both AFT and NEA were in the city for another event and would like to join her at our event. We appreciated Randi Weingarten and Becky Pringle joining us to highlight the value of educator involvement, both active and retired. Their unexpected attendance made the event particularly meaningful.

In reflecting on our journey, it is clear that the strength of our retired educators' community lies in both its deep roots and its ongoing adaptability. From humble beginnings to a vibrant, organized network, our association has shown that staying connected enriches not only our own lives but also strengthens the fabric of public education as a whole. Through dedication, collaboration, and a shared sense of purpose, we have created opportunities to support one another, advocate for crucial issues, and continue contributing to the next generation. As we look ahead, we remain committed to fostering meaningful connections, championing the causes that matter to us, and ensuring that the wisdom of experience continues to guide our path. Local retiree associations play an important role in supporting public education and building connections between the past, present and future.

In Solidarity,

Paul Berge and Wes Hanna
Co-founders – Burnsville Area Retired Teachers (BART)