

Action Line—March, 2007

The Good News

We are pleased to announce that **Sally Barnett** has agreed to join Pat Daly as co-chair of the DFT Retirees Chapter. Sally was a social studies teacher at Edsel Ford before she became the longest serving president of the Dearborn Federation of Teachers. Before her recent retirement, Sally had been the **Director of Human Resources** at Henry Ford Community College, and she concluded her service at HFCC as interim president of the college. Sally brings to the Retiree Chapter a wealth of experience and skills that will greatly enhance our efforts to better serve the needs and interests of our members.

The Not So Good News

In the coming year the attacks upon our retirement system are going to increase in frequency and intensity as state legislators look for ways to deal with Michigan's current economic problems. Enclosed with this **Action Line** is a pamphlet published by the **American Federation of Teachers (AFT)** that should arm retirees with important facts they will need to fight attempts to change our current retirement system. Every retiree should know the difference between two kinds of retirement systems, a "**defined benefit**," the kind we have now, and a "**defined contribution**," the kind that a number of powerful groups and state legislators think we should have. We have been successful in the past in blocking attacks on our pension system by organizing a flood of letters and phone calls to legislators. The misinformation and distortions of truth that will be used by those who wish to abolish the defined benefit system must be met with the kind of factual information provided in this AFT publication. In the coming months, Retiree Chapter mem-

bers may be asked to call, write, or e-mail legislators. A prompt, unified, and overwhelming response is our best defense against any attempts to solve the state's budget problems by altering our pension system, or taking away hard-won health benefits.

Oakwood Common

If you have driven along Rotunda Drive in Dearborn and noticed the well-landscaped entrance to Oakwood Common, you may have wondered what it's like inside a life care-retirement community. Now, you will have the chance to satisfy your curiosity. **Mark Tuesday, May 1, on your calendar.** The Retirees Chapter has made arrangements for a luncheon at Oakwood Common on May 1. Members, spouses, and friends will enjoy an excellent complimentary lunch, receive information about what Oakwood Common offers retirees, and have a chance to tour the complex. Retiree Chapter members will receive a flyer in early April providing more details and reservation information.

Don't Throw it Out

Have you ever been about to take some cough medicine that has been in the medicine cabinet for some time and noticed that the expiration date was a year ago? Do you throw it out immediately, or do you take a chance and use it although that expiration date makes you feel uneasy? Relax. There is a good chance your decision to use the item was the correct one. **The Food and Drug Administration, Shelf Life Extension Program**, which has studied hundreds of medications for the military since 1985, found that treatments remain effective for an average of five-and-a-half years after expiration. The program also found that 88

percent of medications remain effective for at least one year after expiration, and that some remain effective for as long as 14 years. Some patient advocates maintain that pharmaceutical companies establish earlier expiration dates to increase sales, and some pharmacy specialists have recommended that the PDA study medications over longer periods and possibly establish later dates.

The State of Denmark

A recent issue of the **British Medical Journal (BMJ)** reported that over the past 30 years the citizens of Denmark have scored higher than any other Western country on measures of life satisfaction, and scientists think they know why. The **BMJ** article reviewed six likely and unlikely explanations, and concluded that the country's secret is a culture of low expectations. The researchers arrived at their conclusion by a process of elimination and humor. Danes may have more fun, they argue, but Sweden has a higher prevalence of them. As for climate, Danes "bask in a somewhat colder and cloudier version of the balmy English weather." They also eat fatty foods and drink a lot and, genetically, they are not different from their gloomier Scandinavian neighbors. And in 1992 the Danes won the European Championship in soccer, creating "such a state of euphoria that the country has not been the same since." But on surveys, Danes continually report lower expectations for the year to come, compared with most other nations. And "year after year, they are pleasantly surprised to find that not everything is getting more rotten in the state of Denmark," the article concludes.

Boomer Trouble

Probably only a small percentage of Retiree Chapter members would fall into the "baby boomer" category. The "baby boomer" designation generally applies to those born between 1946 and 1964. Many members, however have

children and grandchildren who are in this economically, politically, and socially significant portion of the population. The boomers currently represent approximately 30% of the total US population. A recent **Watt Street Jesroai™** article highlighted the question of how well the boomers may be prepared for retirement. Prof. John Karl Scholz, a professor at the **University of Wisconsin**, and his co-authors studied people born between 1931 and 1941 and found at least 80% had saved enough for retirement. However, other research by non-profits, private companies, and financial firms, and academics found that baby boomers are in for a rude awakening. Some experts predict that nearly 45% of working age households risk being unprepared for retirement. This is partly because many baby boomers face challenges their parents managed to avoid. It is much less likely that retiring boomers will receive the kind of defined benefit pension or employer provided health benefits that their parents received, and future generations will have to wait till a later age than their parents and grandparents to receive full Social Security benefits.

Departed Friends

We have recently received word that **Earlene Moyna-Mark**, retired teacher from Snow, passed away on February 12. She was the wife of retired Stout teacher, Phil Mark, and mother of Marcia Mark, 1st grade teacher at William Ford.

Editor, Pat Daly