

# Chapter History

## MARSP Award for Distinguished Service

[The MARSP Award for Distinguished Service was initiated in 1980 by MARSP President Dr. Richard N. Percy of Saint Joseph, Michigan.]

- 1981** – Richard N. Percy
- 1986** – Mildred Webster
- 1994** – Stephen Nisbet
- 1997** – Mary Buesing
- 1998** – Mildred Ast
- 2000** – Charles H. Ahnert
- 2002** – Richard Brame
- 2003** – Beverly Kaiser
- 2004** – Gladys Peeples Burks
- 2005** – Norma Goldner
- 2007** – Joyce Stockman
- 2009** – Oline Edge
- 2010** – Charles H. Ahnert
- 2014** – Charles H. Long

## MARSP-BCC Award for Dedicated Service

- 1981** – Marianne Bard, Ellen L. Finley, Ida Hoon, and Paul F. Haring
- 1984** - Alden E. Bierman.
- 1992** – Mildred Ast, Stephen Nisbet, Richard N. Percy, Frances Schroeder, and Mildred Webster.
- 1993** – Charles H. Ahnert, Mary Buesing, Maxine Brule, Dwight Brink, Ruth Ollhoff, and Emmalou Wilson.
- 1998** – Wilbur Dick, Beverly Kaiser, Cliff Machacek, Beverly Pringle, and Mary Wilhelmsen.
- 2005** – Donald E. Alsbro, Richard Brame, Gladys Peeples Burks, James H. Keech, and Norma Goldner.
- 2006** – Oline Edge and Joyce Stockman
- 2007** – Virginia Light
- 2010** – Francis C. Schroeder
- 2011** – Charles H. Long
- 2012** – Patricia E. Wightman-Fisk
- 2013** – Diane Buczwinski
- 2014** – Doris DeWitt
- 2015** – Charles H. Long
- 2016** – Patricia Snyder

## NRTA Award for Distinguished Service

[The National Retired Teachers Association (NRTA) is the AARP's Educator Community.]

- 1970** - Ruth H. Ollhoff, Evelyn Vogel
- 1978** - Ida H. Hoon, Alden E. Bierman
- 1979** - Paul E Haring and Mildred Webster

## Past Presidents

- Ruth Ollhoff 1968 – 1970
- Evelyn Vogel 1970 – 1971
- Ruth Tomlinson 1971 – 1973
- Louise Maxwell 1973 – 1975
- Richard N. Percy 1975 – 1977
- Mary C. Buesing 1977 – 1978
- Earl H. Place 1978 – 1980
- Mildred E. Webster 1980 – 1982
- Dwight Brink 1982 – 1983
- Stephen Nisbet 1983 – 1984
- Victor Wier 1984 – 1985
- Jean Borst Brown 1985 – 1987
- Mildred Ast 1987 – 1989
- Emmalou Wilson 1989 – 1991
- Beverly Kaiser 1991 – 1993
- Wilbur Dick 1993 – 1994
- Mary Wilhelmsen 1994 – 1996
- Richard Brame 1996 – 1998
- James Keech 1998 – 2000
- Beverly Pringle 2000 – 2001
- Gladys Peeples-Burks 2001 – 2004
- Doris De Witt 2004 – 2006
- Norma Goldner 2006 – 2008
- Patricia E. Wightman-Fisk 2008 – 2010
- Co-Presidents 2010- 2011
- Patricia E. Wightman-Fisk  
Norma Goldner
- Rochelle Strunk 2011 – 2013

## Chapter Recognition

**Silver Seal** – 2005

**Gold Seal** – 2006; 2007; 2008; 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016

## Chapter History Narrative

The Berrien County Chapter has always welcomed all public school retirees. Its purpose has been to help school retirees live in health and dignity and to improve education in Michigan. Though formed as a group primarily to promote the interests of retired school personnel and educational issues in Michigan, one of the most pleasurable aspects of the group is a social one. Meeting and keeping in touch with old friends and colleagues has always been a bonus to attending meetings.

The Michigan Association of Retired School Personnel (MARSP-BCC) began in 1968 as the Berrien County Retired Public School Employees Association when the Kalamazoo Chapter of the Michigan Retired Teachers Association sent a list of Berrien County retired teachers to Mrs. Alice Richie, a retired St. Joseph teacher. She and the other women on the list subsequently met to discuss forming a local chapter.

The first meeting of our organization was held on Wednesday, March 13, 1968, in the auditorium of the Maud Preston Palenske Library in Saint Joseph, Michigan, with Miss Marianne Bard presiding as temporary chairman. The first elected president of the Berrien County Retired Public School Employees Association was Mrs. Frederick Ollhoff, who accepted the Charter for the Berrien County group at the annual meeting of the Michigan Retired Teachers Association (MRTA) held on May 2nd, 1968 in Lansing. The retirees attending were:

**From Benton Harbor:** Alice Canfield, Emma Clemmens, Ruth Courtright, Shirley Denton, Florence Getzlaff, Eulah Glade, Lela Kittel, Mildred Ochs, Evelyn Vogel, Mabel M. Willmeng.

**From Millburg:** Gladys Fricke.

**From Saint Joseph:** Marianne Bard, Madge Bartz, Isabel Geik, Margaret Hanna, Ruth Ollhoff, Alice Ritchie, Margaret Robb, Grace Stanford, Ruth Tomlinson, Loretta White

**From Watervliet:** Mildred Cronin, Wilma Schaus.

The group appointed Marianne Bard to serve as temporary chair and Mildred Ochs to serve as temporary secretary. Dorothy Dunbar, the first

treasurer, served for two years. Mrs. Frederick Ollhoff, who accepted the Charter for the Berrien County group at the annual meeting of the Michigan Retired Teachers Association (MRTA) held on May 2nd, 1968 in Lansing.

In 1974, the Michigan Retired Teachers Association became the Michigan Association of Retired School Personnel and we were then a chapter of MARSP. In 1988, Berrien County's name was listed in our program book as Berrien County Association of Retired School Personnel. Since the first meeting in 1968, the organization grew to 800 members in 1997. In 2008, the name was changed to Michigan Association of Retired School Personnel-Berrien County Chapter (MARSP-BCC).

The Chapter's first newsletter was started by Emma Lou Wilson and the first membership newsletter was published in August of 1989. Since that time there have been four newsletters published each year. The first volume was entitled *Emmalou's Inkings*. The second volume's name was changed to *Beverly's Bulletin* and very soon to see the third volume since the name was changed again by the Executive Board at the July 1992 meeting to *MARSP-BCC Newsletter*.

In 1971, the organization sponsored a program to help school personnel prepare for retirement. Since then, annual workshops have provided valuable retirement information to school personnel planning to retire and to those already retired. In 1991, the scholarship program to help students become teachers was established. And at about the same time on the social front, the Chapter began having summer picnics. The first ones were held at a park in Berrien Springs, with Wilbur Dick's orchestra providing the music.

In 1991, a committee was organized to promote a scholarship to be presented to a junior or senior in a four year institution who is studying in the field of education. This committee worked very hard over the year and presented the first \$500.00 scholarship to Amy Lynn Rambo at the May 1992 general meeting. As of June 10, 2014, \$22,750 has been given in scholarships. The list of scholarship

recipients and scholarship amounts are available in a separate document.

In the early 1990s summer picnics were organized and Wilbur Dick and his Orchestra provided the music.

The 25th Anniversary of BCC was held at the Mendel Center, Lake Michigan College, on May 4, 1993. Over 300 members and guests attended the celebration, including MARSP State and MARSP Area officials as well as officers of many surrounding chapters. Many of these individuals were recognized and some spoke to the gathering.

The 30th Anniversary of BCC was celebrated at the Saint Joseph Kicker's Club in Arden, October 6, 1998. The featured speakers were Bonnie Carpenter, MARSP Executive Director, and John Proos, representing U.S. Congressman Fred Upton. Other distinguished guests were MARSP President Clarence Miller, MARSP Vice - President John Caldwell and Dr. Penny Carlson - Carmichael, MARSP Area 22 Director. Two Charter Members, Ruth Ollhoff and Margaret Hanna were honored. All past presidents, including our first president Ruth Ollhoff, were honored, as well as former MARSP Distinguished Service Award recipients, and former BCC Dedicated Service Award winners. There were some 240 members and guests in attendance.

***March of 2003 marked our 35th year.***

We anticipate moving forward and changing with the times guided by our goals and the purpose of the organization.

In December of 2005, Blue Cross/Blue Shield stopped using Social Security Numbers on ID Cards and all other correspondence.

The BCARS website started in August of 2006.

In 2007, because of weather conditions, the board changed the December and February meetings to June and September.

On October 1, 2008, the MPSERS Board changed the vision care providers from VSP to EyeMed Vision Care. The chapter's name was changed from Berrien County Association of Retired School Personnel [BCARS] to Michigan Association of Retired School Personnel – Berrien County Chapter [MARSP–BCC] to meet the Internal Revenue Service requirement that the organization's name indicate that the organization is part of a parent organization.

In March of 2008 we celebrated our 40th year of service to the retired personnel of Berrien

County. In 20089, the scholarships given to students from Berrien County reached a total of \$15,000.

In April 2009, the Chapter Delegates and members, no longer had to travel to a regional location for the Annual Conference. To save costs and enable more to get the information directly, the business of the MARSP Annual Meeting was conducted during the chapter meeting and included a DVD presentation and discussion conducted by the Area 22 officers.

In 2009, three special programs, "The Railroad Cometh," "Tribute to the Veterans," and "The Misfits" entertained the MARSP-BCC members at the luncheons. The June meeting featured the two \$750 scholarship winners. Program Chairman Don Alsbro won the Margaret B. Upton Volunteer Leadership Award for his work on the "Lest We Forget" tribute to veterans. During the year, the chapter made donations in memory of Mildred L. Ast and Ernie Dear as well as several other members.

In 2010, the four membership meetings included: Florence Wolfanger and her "Therapy Dogs in Hospice," Vietnam veterans presenting "Lest We Forget the Vietnam War," the Annual Meeting which featured a MARSP DVD-Presentation, and finally, the introduction of the two \$750 scholarship winners as well as a "Lest We Forget Tribute to American Veterans." At the Annual Meeting, Charles H. Ahnert—Newsletter editor, Yearbook publisher, and Treasurer—received a MARSP Distinguished Service Award for his 19 years in office. Fran Schroeder was presented a Certificate of Appreciation for her many years of collecting obituaries for BCC.

During 2010-2011, Jean Cellentani presented "Exercise for Seniors" at September luncheon meeting at Pebblewood Restaurant, and for the November luncheon at Chapel Hill United Methodist Church, Jill Claeys, from Lake Michigan College, provided information on wellness. The April MARSP Annual Meeting with DVD presentation held at the Stevensville United Methodist Church was conducted by Area 22 Director Bob Kucera. Also in April, the retirement seminar scheduled by Richard Brame was held at the Berrien RESA and included sessions on the MPSERS Retirement plan Blue Cross—Blue Shield & Medicare, and Social Security. For the June meeting at the St. Joseph-Lincoln Senior, Center Ray and Shirley Truhn presented a program on the Personal Energy Transportation, Charles Jesperson presented a program on the International Rotary Water

Purification Program, our new president Rochelle Strunk was installed as our new president by Doris DeWitt, \$750 scholarships were presented to Elizabeth Edwards and Meghan Brown, and the new MARSP-BCC sign was displayed. During the year, we collected and donated eyeglasses and food. We also donated the school supplies that had been used for the luncheon meeting table décor. This year was the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of MARSP, the year that MARSP membership reached a record high, and the year Bonnie Carpenter retired after 28 years as MARSP's executive director. It was also a time of economic change in Michigan—and the nation—that affected both current and retired personnel.

During **2011-2012**, Mark Guastella became MARSP Executive Director. With the state and the nation facing economic challenges, MARSP had a busy year working to effect change in legislation that negatively impacted MSPERS retirees. In April, three hundred attended the retirement seminar sponsored by MARSP-BCC and held at the Berrien RESA. In addition to the MARSP Annual Meeting, the programs for the membership meetings included two programs presented by the Region IV Area Agency on Aging and a video history of the House of David. The Program Committee added musical performances to the luncheon meetings. During the June meeting, George Pica was elected vice president and Audrey Antosz and Peter O'Connor received two \$750 scholarships provided by contributions from MARSP-BCC members. Contributions in memory of Vivian Schillio were received to fund scholarships for school speech and language pathologists.

During **2012-2013**, two scholarships totaling \$3,000 were given in memory of Vivian Schillo. The \$750 Beverly Pringle Scholarship was given to Allison Gleiss. Luncheon meeting programs included John Bettig (survivor of Communism, Nazism, and a displacement camp), Judy Shehigian on the history of one-room schools in Michigan, and MARSP President Les Nixon. Area 22 Assistant Director Charles Long conducted the MARSP Annual Meeting in the absence of Area 22 Director Bob Kucera. During the June membership meeting, Diane Buczwinski, secretary and Scholarship Committee chair, received the MARSP-BCC Award for Dedicated Service; and Rochelle Strunk, chapter president, conducted the installation of George Pica as 2013-2014 chapter president.

During **2013-2014**, in addition to the MARSP Annual Meeting with a new, interview format for the DVD presentation, membership meeting programs included a presentation on the Boys and Girls Club of Benton Harbor, a presentation on insurance and other retirement issues by MARSP Executive Director Mark Guastella, and Michael Kline's presentation on Al Capone and the St. Valentine Day Massacre. During two meetings, students from the Citade Dance and Music Center performed music. During the June meeting, pianist Katie Kempf performed and Sally Cheek presented Jessica Trail and Karleann Stankiewicz with \$750 scholarships on behalf of the Scholarship Committee and the Berrien County Chapter. During the year, the number of call coordinators increased to eight and the number of callers increased to forty-two. Efforts to find a member willing to serve as first vice president were unsuccessful. In March, thanks to the efforts of Pat Wightman-Fisk, a special event enabled sixty members to meet in the Sunset area of the Shawdowland Ballroom in Saint Joseph, Michigan, for presentations on the Silver Beach Amusement Park (closed in 1971) and the new Silver Beach Carousel (opened in 2010). The special event included coffee and dessert and an opportunity to view and ride the carousel. Sinie Bass became one of the chapter's two online facilitators. Online facilitators have access to the MARSP database to facilitate MARSP and MARSP-BCC membership. Mary Anne Claywell was elected and installed for a two-year term as second vice president. Diane Buczwinski was elected and installed as secretary for another two years; Charles Long was elected and installed as treasurer for another two years. To eliminate the cost of yearbook publication, the board made the decision to have the yearbook published by School District Directories, a division of Cathedral Directories. The publication cost is paid by yearbook advertisers obtained by School District Directories.

During **2014-2015**, for the September meeting, Tracy Gierado, North Berrien Historical Museum Executive Director and Curator, presented *Legends of Paw Paw Lake*, an illustrated overview of Paw Paw Lake history. For the November meeting, Robert Myers, curator of the History Center at Courthouse Square, presented the PowerPoint program *Locomotives Along the Lakeshore: Railroads of Berrien County, Michigan*. Only 85 attended the April MARSP Annual Conference. Charles Long, Area

Area 22 Assistant Director conducted the MARSP Annual Meeting while Area 22 Director conducted the meeting for another Area 22 chapter meeting on the same day. The reason for the low attendance (135 attended the 2014 meeting) is unknown, but Easter weekend coming a week before the meeting is thought to have been a factor. Few changes were made in retirees' pensions and insurance, and no major issues were presented in the DVD presentation. During the April 14 MARSP-BCC meeting, the current officers (George Pica, Mary Anne Claywell, Charles Long, and Diane Buczwinski) were elected to another two-year term, but the position of second vice president remained unfilled.

During the June 9<sup>th</sup> meeting Dr. Gyl Kasewurm dispelled the myths of hearing healthcare and shared information on the latest technology. Thanks to the contributions of members attending the luncheon meetings, the two 2015 MARSP-BCC Scholarships were increased from \$750 to \$1,000 and presented to Lise Von Koenig and Alyvia Nadea. The \$2,000 balance of the funds provided by Dr. Serge Schillio in memory of his wife Vivian was awarded to Maggie Patnoudes. Scholarship Chair Diane Buczwinski announced that the chapter would be receiving 5% of the estate of Dorothy Hawks, approximately \$90,000, to fund scholarships. The chapter's scholarship will be renamed the Dorothy Hawks Scholarship, and members will no longer be asked to contribute to chapter scholarships. On June 19<sup>th</sup>, George Pica, Mary Anne Claywell, Sinie Bass, and Charles Long attended the MARSP leadership conference held at the Kalamazoo Regional Education Service Agency (RESA) conducted by Executive Director Mark Guastella, President Bob Wiles, and Membership Co-Chair Pamela Trask. During the year the chapter adjusted to MARSP providing chapter member information in the form of Excel worksheets instead of allowing the chapter's Online Facilitators direct access to the MARSP database.

During **2015-2016**, for the September meeting, Robert Myers from the History Center at Courthouse Square in Berrien Springs presented "The *RMS Titanic* and Southwest Michigan." The meeting was held at the Berrien RESA, which had not been used as a meeting place for several years because the number attending exceeded the meeting room capacity. For November, J. Hayne from Hospice at Home presented the program. In April, Area 22 Director Bob Kucera conducted the

meeting. During the April meeting, the membership approved increasing the executive board and board officers by including the three immediate past presidents. (Previously, only the immediate past president was included.) On April 20 and 21, the chapter again sponsored the two-day Retirement Planning Seminar. For June, chapter member Buzz Calvert presented "Forgotten Outposts and Ancient Sites," and the members learned about the people, life, and sites in Michigan's ancient history.

In January, the chapter received the first payment from the Dorothy Hawks estate and \$34,000 was invested in funds of the American Funds Service Company. At the June meeting, Jennifer Wharton received the first Dorothy Hawks Scholarship. Because only one applicant qualified for the award, the amount of the award for this year was increased from \$1,000 to \$1,500.

The chapter ended the year with 685 members; however, 103 of 2015-2016 members had not yet renewed their membership. The position of second vice president remained unfilled.

**During 2016-2017**, the chapter held four membership meetings. On September 12, the program was on Pokagon Culture and History. On November 8, 2016, the program was on Benton Harbor and Saint Joseph history. Area 22 Director Charles Long conducted the MARSP annual meeting with the DVD presentation on April 11, 2017. On June 13, 2017, Berrien County Deputy Sheriff Kelly Laesch spoke on senior safety and three \$1,500 scholarships were awarded. The Retirement Planning Seminar provided information about Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan on April 19, 2017, and the Michigan Public School Employees Retirement System (MPSERS) on April 20, 2017.

During the year, MARSP communicated concern and the need for member response to legislative efforts to replace the defined benefit retirement with a 401K retirement for new retirees. The chapter received the balance of the Dorothy Hawks bequest for scholarships and ended the year with \$87,185.47 invested for scholarships. The chapter was unable to find a member willing to fill the first vice president vacancy or to replace Charles Long as treasurer. On June 30, 2017, the chapter had 504 2018 members, 148 life members, and 111 members who had not renewed their 2017 membership.

