

Elkhart County Retired Teachers Association

ECRTA Newsletter, August 2026

Website: www.ecrta.com

From Your President: Barb Hrynewycz

Celebrations abound at this time of year: end of school, graduations, our 250th birthday as a nation, and we celebrate you, our amazing teachers. You may be retired from public school, but your influence continues. How many graduation parties did you attend? How many former students have you encountered? Last week at a regional theater production, a former student sat by my mom and recounted the many memories he had with her. You still matter!



One of my goals has been to increase opportunities to serve. Each luncheon we highlighted a different non-profit to donate our "Tip-jar" monies. Representatives from First Light Mission in Goshen, Susanna's Kitchen in Elkhart, and Isaiah's House 117 shared how what they do benefits our community. They also gave examples of where we could join in as volunteers. If you are looking for a place to volunteer, come to a luncheon to see the display Sherrie has created. If you want to get to know ECRTA members better, Bonnie has provided us a place to gather to sew totes for CASA and First Light Mission. Or check out our website <http://www.ECRTA.com>. You'll find a list of local non-profits. You will also now find a link to the minutes of our quarterly luncheons. Thanks, Ron, for making that happen.

On the political front, we will be receiving a "13th" check through the efforts of our IRTA lobbyists. Plan ahead to thank those legislators when you see them in the community. Encourage them to make it permanent.

I am excited to announce our first luncheon of the new membership year will be at Goshen College. Kathy Meyer Reimer, Education Department Chair, recently retired, will tell us about the trends in education in Indiana. We have opportunity to advocate and mentor this next group of educators. Please come, bring your former colleagues and learn what and where we can be the most effective.

Starting with this edition of the newsletter, we will now be sending them electronically to the email on file. Increased postage and printing costs are the main reasons for this. At the September luncheon when you pay your dues, we will have membership cards and volunteer forms available to pick up.



Lastly, my goal for this next year is to increase membership. I invite your participation in finding ways to connect with the newly retired. Tell them why you are an ECRTA and/or IRTA member. Encourage them to visit our website. Invite them to a luncheon. Together we can grow.



Find Indiana legislative news, retired teacher benefits and services, and teacher foundation news: www.retiredteachers.org



ECRTA Luncheons:

September 10, 2026
at Goshen College
November 12, 2026
April 8, 2027
June 10, 2027

Mark your Calendars:

IRTA Fall Workshops will begin with brief morning sessions followed by curated afternoon field trips www.retiredteachers.org:
September 22—**Fair Oaks Farm**: explore integrated agriculture and sustainable exhibits in Fair Oaks, Indiana
September 23—**Black Pine Animal Sanctuary**: connect with rescued wildlife and conservation education in Albion, Indiana
September 24—**Bob Ross Experience**: create and reflect through a guided painting experience in Muncie, Indiana
December 31: Volunteer hours due to Lenette Burckhardt
klburckhart@gmail.com

Officers & Committee Chairpersons

President:	Barb Hrynewycz	IRTA Foundation:	Need a volunteer
President Elect/Programs:	Need a volunteer	Community Services:	Bonnie Reagan
Recording Secretary:	Sherrie Huang	Volunteer Hours:	Lenette
Burckhart			
Corresponding Secretary:	Maryann Shultz	Membership:	Marie Palacios
Treasurer:	Karen Tobias	Scholarship:	Danae Wirth
Past President:	Carol Grieser	Necrology:	Need a volunteer
Public Relations:	Dawn Wysong	Web Site:	Ron Geyer
Legislative:	Need a volunteer		

2026-27 ECRTA Scholarship Recipient by Sherrie Huang

Jillian Mann is our 2026-27 ECRTA scholarship recipient. Jillian graduated from Elkhart High School and has been attending IUSB. She has a lot of experience with children as she works at Growing Kids and has spent time in the classroom already. She will be doing her student teaching at Concord Ox Bow this coming fall.



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Jillian is the daughter of Brian and Jennifer Mann and the middle of five children. She enjoys doing activities with her family, especially pickleball. She also loves being outside at parks. ECRTA wishes Jillian the best in her teaching career and wants her to know that she has our support!

President Barb & Jillian

Find the scholarship information, list of officers, a volunteer form, association minutes, legislative information, and community service ideas on the Elkhart County Retired Teachers Association website: www.ECRTA.com

Volunteer Hours by Lenette Burckhardt



A thank you for the 10,041 volunteer hours recorded by 42 members of ECRTA and a thank you for the hours not reported---an appreciation for generously giving your time to others. Each hour represents \$31.05 or ~\$312K, a large sum donated to the State of Indiana. It's very important to keep track of your

volunteer hours and report them to the volunteer coordinator at the end of the year. The IRTA lobbying team uses these hours when it approaches the legislature representing retired teachers to show how they give back to the community and state.



Indian Retired Teachers Association recognized three of our ECRTA members:

Bonnie Reagan received the Group Project Award for leading our Tote project once again for 2025-26.

Barbara Hryniewicz received the Clock Award, demonstrating a willingness to give unselfishly of her time and energy for the benefit of others and has truly gone that extra mile. CONGRATULATIONS, Barb, and thank you for serving as our president for 4 years!

Dawn Wysong received the Outstanding Newsletter Award. She has generated the ECRTA newsletter for 10 years.

Bonnie, Barb,

Membership by Marie Palacios

For the 2025-2026 year, ECRTA had 153 members. We had seven ECRTA members pass away this past year. Just to remind you, your current membership is for the last school year and not the calendar year. This means your membership will expire August 31, 2026.



It is important to renew your membership each year because each member is an important part of our association. Dues are \$15 for the year. Ten dollars of your dues are used for organization expenses and \$5 goes to the ECRTA scholarship fund. (We also welcome extra money for the scholarship fund.) Every year we give a \$1,000 scholarship to a sophomore, junior, or senior in an Indiana college with an education major. We appreciate your support each year.

You may send your \$15 membership fee and any changes to your address, phone or email to Marie Palacios, 1623 Garland Drive, Goshen, IN 46526 or pay at the September luncheon. Your membership card will be handed out at the luncheon or mailed to you.

Please encourage all your teacher friends to join and encourage all new retirees to join as well. Looking forward to seeing you at the September 10 luncheon.

Community Service by Bonnie Reagan



The ECRTA members continued to sew totes for the third year. This has been a group project that has produced a total of 65 totes. The totes are donated to CAPS and First Light Mission. CAPS gives a child entering the foster care program a trash bag to place their belongings in as they are



removed from their homes. The tote replaces the practice of using a trash bag. First Light Mission is devoted to providing a place of refuge and fresh starts for the homeless in crisis. The totes serve a variety of needs; from storing clothing to blankets to toys. We plan to continue our tote sewing project for another year.

In addition to the totes we have as a group collected 40 children's books to be placed in the First Light Mission's library. We donated over 50 vases to Joy Blooms, a local organization that supplies fresh flower arrangements to nursing homes and shut ins. Thank you to all who have donated items and time.

Elkhart County Retirees

The following is the list of retirees from IRTA that are associated with Elkhart County either the school retiring from or by residence. If you know of others who have retired, please contact us.

- Concord Community Schools:**
Katherine Burkert
Laura Corwin
- Elkhart Community Schools:**
Michelle Johnson
Tatyana Sukhotinskaya
Cyle Weldy
- Resident of Elkhart County:**
Travis Burleson
Sandy Hunter
Thomas Keeley
Jackie Sebesta
- Fairfield Community Schools**
Tim Haines
- Goshen Community Schools**
Londa Bontrager
Carol Diaz
Ted Love
Dane Mehl
Jodi Miller
Carla Plavchak
- Middlebury Community Schools**
- Baugo Community Schools**
- WaNee Community Schools**

Susannah’s Kitchen by Sherrie Huang

During our April luncheon Dale McDowell presented information about Susanna’s Kitchen located at the Grace Lutheran Church at 831 W. Marion Street in Elkhart. Susanna’s Kitchen is a nonprofit organization that has provided free hot lunches five days a week to anyone who walks through their door. It also has clothes closet open two days a week that provides clothes as well as other needed items, such as blankets and sleeping bags.



Susanna’s Kitchen, also known as Elkhart Kitchen, Inc, has been providing this service for forty-four years. It began as a project supported by local Methodist Churches but has now expanded to be supported by twenty area churches as well as some community organizations. Over sixty volunteers help support this program every month.

Approximately 17,695 meals were served in 2025 to children as well as adults. With a budget of \$56,000 in 2026, they’re able to provide a much-needed service to homeless and low-income individuals and families alike. Susannah’s Kitchen can always [use volunteers](#).

Comment [BH1]:

Necrology Report June 1, 2025 – May 31, 2026

Thank you to Marie Palacios for creating this report!

Roma Anglemyer	*Daniel E. Hochstetler	*David F. Nicoson
Phyllis J. Beck	Anna Hubartt	Marilyn R. Oplinger
Barbara Berkey	Rosalie A. Isenbarger	Cynthia K. Padgett
Verna Brinson	Janice H. Jeffers	Sandra L. Polk
Brian Burkart	Lenora Jones	Susan Price
Travis L. Burleson	Gerald Kasprzak	Myrna J. Rarick
*Germaine Burns	Linda Kauffman	Terry Rickard

Philip Campagnoli	Mark Kerrn	Robert Riley
Rosa Marie Cender	*Bruce W. Klonowski	John F. Speicher
Arwilda B. Cushman	Dana B. Knapp	Albert D. Stealy, Jr.
Mary Demos	Kathleen Kulp	*Dorcus Stegelmann
Ann Eaton	Wayne Lambright	Philip D. Stillson
Lillian Elias	*Gay Layman	Marilyn R. Strakowski
Susan Ferguson	George Leis	Steven C. Stutsman
Gerald Ferro	P. Michael Lutz	*Patricia Tubbs
Frances A. Fitzgerald	Catherine Manley	Celesta A. Vaughn
Barbara Fougrousse	Jerry E. McClanahan	Joy R. VonBlon
Marlene J. Gingerich	Thyra Metzler	Frederick Voorde
*James W. Hales	Lois Middleton	*Nancy Willis
MaryAnn Hartzler	Leroy C. Miller	
Grace E. Hershberger	Jerry Miller	*ECRTA member

Isaiah 117 House



At our June luncheon Heather Doberenz, Laura Berkey, and Becky Burt shared with us that plans are in place and funds being raised to plant an Isaiah 117 House in Elkhart County. The house will provide a comforting home where children can be brought to wait for placement with a foster family. Currently there are 30 people involved with getting this house established which will reduce trauma for children awaiting placement, provide birth families to have supervised visits with the children in the state's custody, lighten the load for child welfare services, and ease the transition for foster families. The home atmosphere with loving volunteers will provide a "you are valued"

atmosphere for each child. There are and will be many opportunities for volunteers. More information can be found at ElkhartIN@isaiah117house.com