

## **PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE:**

Well, it has been six months since I began my term as President of SCARE and it has been very busy. As I said at the beginning of the year it will be a year of change and not all for the good. In February SCARE filed a claim against the County about the planned decrease in retiree health benefits. The County did not respond within the legal time frames. By law this becomes a denial of the claim. While the SCARE Board was working with our legal counsel to begin litigation our attorney was contacted by County Counsel suggesting we enter into a Mediation Process. Although some of us believed that mediation was just another delaying tactic on the part of the County, we also knew it was one last chance to try to work with the County toward a solution that could meet both our needs. After two weeks with three full days of mediation, several small group meetings and a lot of e-mail, mediation proved unsuccessful and ended on May 8, 2009.

The SCARE Board met for a special meeting on May 9, 2009, to review our next steps strategy. The obvious next step was to continue through the legal process and file suit as soon as possible. Absent any new offer from the County the Board of SCARE will be giving instructions to our attorney to move forward with litigation. Although the mediation process did not result in a settlement we continue to be open to discussions with the County during the upcoming legal process.

As you have heard many times we believe the current County policy to reduce retiree medical benefits is not only illegal, it puts retirees at risk of losing their health insurance as the cost rises and all the medical inflation falls on the retiree. It is also a reversal of many years of promises, which the Board of Supervisors now refuses to recognize were ever made to retirees. All of the years of having wages set at less than the market average of comparison counties, foregoing an automatic COLA on retirement benefits and working cooperatively to solve problems have disappeared leaving many retirees having to choose between basic necessities and health care.

The County has also failed to establish a "Safety Net" program that the Board of Supervisors instructed the CAO to establish. The Safety Net program was to provide financial relief for retirees who could show serious financial hardship related to the changes the Board imposed. As retirees face the first of five cuts to benefits the concept of a safety net has been backburned at best and dropped completely at worst. We are told "we are working on it". A term that has come to mean the County is essentially doing nothing. For any of you who will find it impossible to pay your new insurance rate and still pay your other bills, we suggest you call the County Risk Management Department at 565-2942 and ask about the Safety Net Program for retirees.

I know it is difficult for many but we need to continue to support each other and the active employees who have stood with us in this process. I want to say a special thanks to Phyris Tobler, Greg Jacobs and Ron Piorek for the work they did during the mediation process and to recognize the work of Sacha Steinberger and Jeff Lewis, our attorneys who joined us in mediation.

If you know anyone who is a retiree who does not belong to SCARE, please encourage them to join as we need all the support and voices we can get.

Carol Bauer, President