# SCARE NEWSLETTER

SONOMA COUNTY ASSOCIATION OF RETIRED EMPLOYEES

Published Quarterly | November 2026 | Volume 326, Issue 4


## President's Message

by Andre Bercut

**Big News! Assembly Bill 1601 Becomes Law**

Assembly Bill 1601 received unanimous, bipartisan support in the Senate Employment and Retirement Committee and passed unanimously on the Senate floor. Governor Newsom signed the bill into law on September 27, 2026, and it will take effect January 1, 2027.

Phyris, Ed and I attended the SCERA Educational Investment Seminar on October 7th and 8th which confirmed that SCERA has solid investments. Ed and I attended October 13th Board of Supervisors meeting where Julie Wyne presented SCERA's financial report, total assets over 4 billion and discussed AB 1601. They will be sending various scenarios to the actuaries to provide options for the Board. She put forward amortizing the cost over 20 years and looking possibly for contributions from the General fund. We may not have solid answers until after the first of the year as the law does not go into effect until then. Julie Wyne will be our guest speaker at the November membership meeting and will be giving us updates for next steps in funding a COLA. Let's try to get a full room to thank Julie for her work on our behalf!

SCERA has called for nominations as SCERA Board members serve 3-year terms. Retirees are represented on the SCERA Board by 2 members. The Eighth position is a voting member. The Eighth Alternate doesn't vote but is involved in discussions. Mark Walsh, the current Eighth board member, will be stepping down from his position.

Neil Baker has thrown his hat into the ring to replace Mark. Neil worked for the Office of the Sonoma County Counsel as part of his duties, he provided legal support and representation to SCERA. Since his own retirement in 2005, Neil continued to provide contract special counsel services to SCERA as he pursued his interest in public sector retirement issues. He has served on the SCERA COLA subcommittee and worked with Julie Wyne on drafting the language for AB 1601, and has a long history working for the county on COLA issues. He is currently serving as the Eighth Alternate on the board.

continued on page 2

## Calendar of Events

### Membership Meetings

- November 17, 2026
- February 23, 2027
- May 25, 2027
- August 24, 2027
- November 16, 2027

*Membership meetings are at 1pm at Finley Center and via Zoom*

### Board Meetings

- November 14, 2026
- January 6, 2027
- March 3, 2027
- May 5, 2027
- July 14, 2027

*Board meetings are at 12pm. Dates subject to change.*

### Newsletter via Email

Receiving the newsletter electronically is faster, saves paper, and lets you adjust the font size for easier reading.

If you're willing to receive notices and the newsletter by email, simply send a message to communications@sonomacountyretirees.com authorizing SCARE to send them to you.

Thank you for helping us save paper and postage!

**Disclaimer:** The SCARE Newsletter is published quarterly. While information is believed to be accurate and reliable, SCARE, the Editor, and writers assume no responsibility for errors or inaccuracies.

## Board of Directors Officers

- President - Andre Bercut 707 303-6413 *andre.bercut@gmail.com*
- Vice President - Paul Carroll 707 559-0588 *Pf.carroll58@gmail.com*
- Secretary & Immediate Past President - Kathy Young 707 539-8027 *kyoung2@sonic.net*
- Treasurer - Phyris Tobler 707 795-6926 *phyris@sbcglobal.net*

## Directors at Large

- Carol Bauer
- Chris Bauer
- Ed Clites
- Lou Maricle
- Sherry Parr
- Lis Barca
- 2 Vacant positions

## Retirement Board Retiree Reps

- Mark Walsh
- Alternate: Neil Baker

## Committee Chairs &Tasks

- Health Benefits/JLMBC: *Phyris Tobler*
- Membership: *Lou Maricle*
- Financial Oversight: *Phyris*
- CRCEA Rep: *Carol Bauer* Alternate: *Lou Maricle*
- Newsletter Editor: *Phyris Tobler*
- Programs: *Vacant*
- Scholarships: *Ed Clites*
- SCCLO: *Andre Bercut*
- ICPC: *Bill Robotka*
- NBLC: *Andre Bercut*
- Facebook Coordinator: *Bob Bulwa*
- Website: *Phyris Tobler*

## Contact info on website

continued from page 1

Since Neil is running for the Eighth board member position. Ed Clites has decided to run for the Eighth Alternate. He has regularly attended SCERA Board meetings and annual educational seminars since 2009 upon becoming the SCLEA President as an active and continuing as a retiree since 2015. He would be able to step in with historical experience minimizing the learning curve for the position. He also dedicated time to lobby for AB 1601 including going to Sacramento for the Committee meeting to encourage the committees to pass the bill to the respective legislative floors for a vote.

The SCARE Executive Board has voted unanimously to endorse both Neil and Ed for these positions. As such we encourage each of our members to seriously consider voting for them. We believe they are the right people for the job. You will be getting a ballot from SCERA around November 11 unless Neil and Ed end up running unopposed.

The Website continues to make progress. If you volunteer or have an interesting hobby we would like to hear about it. We would like to publish photos for the newsletter. You can Email items to any board member.

The Political Action Committee (PAC) has been established. Unfortunately, we were unable put together a candidate's night. We will be looking to do so in future races.

Please attend our next Membership Meeting, either in person or on Zoom.

## November 17th Membership Meeting

Our speaker will be **Julie Wyne, Executive Director of SCERA**. Julie will provide an update on the health of our pension system and discuss the next steps for SCERA and the County following the passage and signing of AB 1601.

The new law gives the County greater flexibility in determining cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs), so important decisions remain to be made. Julie will help us understand what comes next and what these changes may mean for retirees.

Come at 12:30 if attending in person or join us at 1:00 pm for the meeting on Zoom: *https://us06web.zoom.us/j/8954632781?omn=83813759825*, Meeting ID: 895463 2781, Dial by your location: +1 669 444 9171

## PREVENT SCAMMERS FROM STEALING YOUR PROPERTY

After seeing ads by Home Title Lock saying it is easy for people to steal your property, I decided to ask our County Recorder, Deva Proto. I sent the following email to her.

As you are probably aware, Home Title Lock is advertising that we need to pay them to protect our home title from thieves as it is so easy for thieves to just change our title over to themselves. I think this is just an attempt to scare people so you sign up and pay for their protection. However, I can't believe that it is that easy for someone to just change your title. But of course, we are getting so used to scams that people are fearful.

Response from Deva:
One thing that those companies don't explain well is that there is no way to prevent something like that from happening. What they do as a service is notify you after the fact. Fraud can happen, but it would require someone to falsify a deed, notarize it and record it (making it public).

Our office has our online index to recorded documents and you can check it 24/7 so check at any time at *https://crarecords.sonomacounty.ca.gov/Web/search/DOCSEARCH429S1*. You search by name, last name followed by first name (no punctuation), to see if anything has been recorded under your name or changed.

Starting no later than January 1, 2027, every Recorder's Office will be mailing recorder notification letters to the current assessed owner whenever a deed or mortgage is recorded based on the Assessor Parcel Number that is listed on the document. This notification is required to go out within 30 days of the recording, and for most counties it will be sent out much sooner than that. Notice will include who to contact if change is fraudulent (law enforcement) and will also include the 1st two pages of the document that was recorded.

## Defeat Identity Thieves! Freeze Your Credit File

It seems the security of our private information is constantly under attack because of the increasing sophistication of phishing scams and hacking operations. With access to your personal information, an identity thief can wreak havoc with your credit that may take months to remedy. It's certainly worth the time to consider taking preventive action.

What is the process to freeze your credit file?
Placing a freeze requires contacting the three major credit bureaus: *www.experian.com* (phone: 888-397-3742), *www.equifax.com* (phone: 800-525-6285) and *www.transunion.com* (phone 800-680-7289). This is relatively easy to accomplish if you have a computer and can access the internet sites of the above bureaus. Each credit bureau has an online process to freeze and unfreeze access to your file. Remember, you must freeze your credit file at each of the three bureaus, or you will remain vulnerable to identity theft. If you do not have computer access, call the above phone numbers and request help.

You can unfreeze your credit file if you need a loan or a new credit card. Just go back to the credit bureaus.

## JLMBC Report

Our retiree subcommittee continues working with the HR Benefits manager to try to find ways to bring down health insurance costs for Medicare recipients. The under 65 retirees have high costs but both Sutter and Kaiser have offered several plans, some with higher deductibles and co-pays. So far, Kaiser has offered a lower cost plan for Medicare recipients but the county is still working with Anthem to get them to offer a lower cost plan. We will have more information on this in Dec.

United Healthcare offers individual plans and has several lower cost plans that retirees can chose from. If you have UHC, you can switch to one of the lower cost plans. You don't have to wait for county open enrollment. Go online to see what they offer.

## Rules for Renewing Drivers License after 70

DMV keeps changing the rules for renewing your drivers license when you are over 70. Currently, you do not have to take a written test unless you have had a traffic violation or collision. You still have to go to the DMV office to take the vision test, update your photo, and report any medical conditions.

If you have to take a test, you can choose the no-fail "e-Learning" option available at *www.dmv.ca.gov/portal/senior-drivers/*. This is easy to pass as you read a section on the rules and then take test on it. You can do this before you make your appointment at the DMV.

## AARP Driver Safety Class

Seniors can take a class offered by AARP to qualify for a discount on their auto insurance. This class is offered at the senior wing at Finley Center in Santa Rosa. You might want to check with your insurance company to see if they offer this discount. AAA insurance company does offer this discount. You have to take a renewal every 3 years. It is also offered at Finley. Cost is $20 if you are a member of AARP.

## Sonoma County Tool Library

There is a tool library in Santa Rosa. It has over 1,000 tools available to anyone who lives or works in Sonoma County. You can borrow these tools for a week and get an extension if you need it longer. It is located at 427 Mendocino Ave, Santa Rosa. It is open limited hours – Wednesday from 5 to 7 p.m. and Saturday from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

The library has tools for home repairs, landscaping and bicycle repairs. They have helped people complete approximately 1,200 fire safe community projects. You may need an expensive tool to complete a project and then never use it again.

The website is *www.borrowtools.org*. You can go there to set up an account and to see what tools are available. Then you can reserve what you need and go in to pick it up during hours they are open.

If you have tools you are not using, you can donate them to the tool library. Maybe you have a chain saw that you no longer feel comfortable using. Or any one of a number of tools you have in your garage taking up space.

The tool library is staffed with volunteers. If you are interested in volunteering, you can go in during open hours or call them at (707) 229-3949.

## For Your Entertainment

The 6th Street Playhouse and the SRJC Theater both offer inexpensive plays that are really well done. You can Google their websites to see what plays are available. If you are over 62, the JC plays cost $20. 6th Street Playhouse tickets are $33 - $46. I highly recommend both of these. *-Phyris*

## Food Safety Tip: USDA FoodKeeper App

Need guidance on safely storing food? The USDA's free FoodKeeper app provides recommended storage times for the refrigerator, freezer, and pantry for a wide variety of foods, including meat, poultry, seafood, produce, dairy products, and eggs.

Remember, these storage times are guidelines to help you keep food safe and reduce waste.

*https://www.foodsafety.gov/keep-food-safe/foodkeeper-app*.

## SRJC Scholarship Awardees

**German, Madelena**: Major and career goal: Dental Hygiene. What are your future goals after SRJC? I plan to go to work and have already contacted several offices. After working a few years, I hope to go back to school to get my Bachelors Degree as I would like to teach Dental Hygiene at SRJC.

**Maccario, Larissa**: Major and career goal: Associate Degree in Nursing. Goal is nurse anesthesiologist. But first, I'd like to work in a pediatric or labor/delivery unit.

How will the gift of scholarship support your educational goals? This scholarship would greatly help me as I am paying for my own education without the help from my parents. Since I am in the nursing program, I am unable to work full time. I have a part time job at REI but that only pays enough to get me by. The gift of a scholarship would help me pursue my dream of becoming a nurse without the burden of going into debt.

**Pudoff, Orion**: Major : Theatre Arts (AA-T) Career goal – Equity Actor. Donor Acknowledgement: Thank you for giving me the opportunity to further my education and my pursuit of excellence. It truly means the world and more to me.

## Updating Contact Information

If you move or change your email or phone number, you need to give your ***updated information*** to the following organizations. They do not share information.

- **SCARE** - send changes to Lou Maricle via email at *maricles2@gmail.com*, or address to 4720 Santa Rosita Ct, Santa Rosa, CA 95405, or call 707 538-7342. We also need changes of phone numbers and email addresses. SCERA, the Retirement Board, does not share information with us. If newsletters are returned, Lou will try to contact you by email or phone but sometimes people forget to update those too and we don't have a way to contact you.

- **SCERA -** You get your pension check from them. Contact them to report changes at 433 Aviation Blvd., Suite 100, Santa Rosa, CA 95403, or call them at 707 565-8100.

- **Sonoma County Human Resources Benefits Unit -** They handle health, dental, and life insurance and send out **Annual Enrollment Booklets**. Contact them at 575 Administration Drive, 116C, SR, 95403, or 707 565-2900 or email at: *benefits@sonomacounty.gov*.

## Growing Population of Seniors includes more with Alzheimer's

The increased growth of the the aging population in Sonoma County means that more older adults are living with Alzheimer's. Currently, there are 10,900 cases representing 1 in 10 residents aged 65 and older. The amount is projected to increase by 80% by 2030, only four years from now. Alzheimer's places additional burdens on both individuals and their caregivers. The Council on Aging (COA) provides several adult day programs throughout the county. Participants benefit from meaningful activities such as cognitive stimulation, social interaction, music, art, and movement. This helps to maintain abilities and enhance their quality of life and provides caregivers with essential respite. If you know someone with Alzheimer's, you may want to contact COA at 707-525-0143 or go to their website for more information— www.councilonaging.com. Or let their caregiver know about this program.

Another resource is Today&Together (https://todayandtogether.org/) facility in Sonoma Valley. They offer adult day services for any older adult needing extra care as the result of Alzheimer's, dementia, or other aging conditions. They also offer a sliding scale to increase affordability. It may be a bit out of the way depending on where you live, but they also have transportation options for folks as far away as Oakmont.

## In Memorium

Our deepest sympathy is extended to the family and friends of the following retirees:

Norma Bise
Lorraine Chele
John Destefano
Marilyn Hundley
Aase Jensen
Suzanne Puska

## SCARE has its own Facebook Page

This is a private (closed) group meaning that the public may not view the contents, and membership must be requested and approved. For those of you already on Facebook, it can be found by searching for Sonoma County Association of Retired Employees (SCARE)" or using the direct link:

*https://www.facebook.com/groups/socoretirees*.

To join the group, go to the page and at the top you will see a box that indicates "Join Group." Once we verify you are indeed a member of SCARE, or are a spouse of a member, you will be added.

Bob Bulwa and Paul Klonsky

## SCARE Membership and Financial Information

from Phyris

SCARE currently has 2030 members. We do not include our financial information in the newsletter, but if you are interested, contact me. I can provide you with a copy of our financial statement (contact information is on page 2).

**Board and Membership Meeting Minutes can be viewed at our website.**

## Congratulations New Retirees and New SCARE Members (in bold)

| | |
|---|---|
| Oscar Acosta | Probation |
| **Carol Allwine** | **Public Health** |
| William Anderson | Information Systems |
| Jason Bowman | Probation |
| **Colleen Butler** | **Superior Court** |
| Leslye Choate | Health Svcs |
| **David Clausen** | **Sheriff's Office** |
| Tambra Curtis | County Counsel |
| Grant Davis | Water Agency |
| Emily Degaetano | Clerk Rec/Assess |
| Sherri Edwards | Child Support Svcs |
| Dea Freid | Regional Parks |
| Leslie Gelormino | Human Services |
| Barbara Green | Clerk Rec/Assess |
| Anna Grubaugh | Human Services |
| Troy Gustafson | Permit & Resource |
| Gregg Horton | Water Agency |
| Paul Hower | Public Infrastructure |
| Timothy Hughes | Sheriff's Office |
| Scott Jamar | District Attorney |
| Eric Keel | Water Agency |
| Katherine Kichinka | Human Services |
| Jan Lees | Human Services |
| Gina Lehl | Ag Commissioner |
| Laurie McQueen | Human Services |
| Char Mendoza | Health Services |
| Dawn Patterson | Superior Court |
| Kiergan Pegg | Human Services |
| **Maria Perez** | **Human Services** |
| **Maximo Pickett** | **CAO** |
| Charles Rivers | PRMD |
| Jann Samuels | PRMD |
| **Karen Solberg** | **Public Infrastructure** |
| Matthew Stapleton | District Attorney |
| Mary Starr | Human Services |
| **Grace Villafuerte** | **Human Services** |
| **Guadalupe Vizcarra** | **Human Services** |
| Robert Wagman | Probation |
| Noah Wagner | Regional Parks |
| Franklin West | Public Infrastructure |
| Arundhuti Zrnich | Health Services |

## Emergency Prep Help

SCARE sponsored a 2 day workshop provided by Emergency Prep Help. This training provides information on how to deal with emergencies including wildfires, earthquakes, and floods and is tailored for seniors as they are the most vulnerable group in these emergency situations and most deaths occur in this group.

73 people indicated interest but many were not able to attend once we got the dates when EPH was available to do the training. We still had 45 people attend. We may sponsor this again next year if we have members who are interested. The next newsletter will have comments from attendees regarding these workshops.

Sonoma County Association of
Retired Employees (SCARE)
P.O. Box 5513
Santa Rosa, CA 95402

Address Service Requested

## General Membership Meeting November 17, 2026

Join us at 12:30 for an in-person meeting at Finley Center, 2060 W College Ave, SR in the Cypress Room. There will be snacks and drinks and the opportunity to visit with friends.
**Vaccinations encouraged if attending in person.**

For those of you who can't attend in person, join us at 1:00 pm for the meeting on Zoom:
https://us06web.zoom.us/j/8954632781?omn=83813759825,
Meeting ID: 895463 2781, Dial by your location: +1 669 444 9171 US

## MEMBERSHIP MEETING AGENDA

- PRESENTER JULIE WYNE, CEO OF SCERA, GIVING UPDATE ON PENSIONS/COLAs
- JLMBC REPORT
- SCCLO/NBLC/ICPC REPORTS
- DRAWING FOR GIFT CARDS (3 for those at Finley and 3 for those on Zoom) Must be present to win.