

A SUAA MEMBERSHIP BRIEFING

from the State Universities Annuitants Association
3085 Stevenson Drive, Suite 301
Springfield, Illinois 62703

April 3, 2008



It is time for SUAA to grow!

Today marks the first day of the SUAA Membership Drive. As reported at the Board of Directors meeting held at Southern Illinois University – Carbondale, the State Universities Retirement System graciously offered to assist SUAA reach working staff aged 40+ on the State University and Community College campuses. ✦ Over 28,000 working staff will be receiving e-mails with a flyer, member application and other information. Another 31,651 will be receiving their request for membership by mail. ✦ It is imperative that each chapter works to make contact with potential members, is available to answer questions and will provide follow-up communication.

How do you reach new members? Contact campus personnel departments, payroll departments, stuff flyers in campus mailboxes, hand deliver flyers to offices, post flyers on bulletin boards, advertise in campus newsletters, set-up a table or kiosk at a campus function, talk to campus administration, promote member-get-a-member activity, talk to campus departments and sponsor an activity that draws attention to SUAA. Make SUAA a familiar name on your campus!



Don't forget about retiring staff! Reach out to those who have indicated that they will be retiring. Don't let them leave campus without signing them up for Dues Deduct. This means everyone who is retiring. Does your chapter have a special program for retirees? Promote participation at your spring meetings and summer picnics. Extend a hand to those who are in the service areas. Make it your task to meet new people.

SUAA cannot grow without significant participation from the chapters.

It is Membership time - **HELP SUAA HIT A HOME RUN . . .**



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You are invited to tailor the Flyer and Letter for your particular chapters and campus. Please don't be bashful. Don't sit on the sidelines. Need additional talking points – call the office – check the website! SUAA Briefings are available. Look under ARCHIVES!

TO: All SUAA Chapters
FROM: Pat Smith, Co-Chair of the
State Membership Committee
DATE: March 2008
RE: State-of-the-State Membership

At the March Board Meeting held at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale on Tuesday, March 11, 2008, SUAA Past President Robert Harper (2002-04) addressed and stressed the importance of a significant increase in SUAA membership focusing on all campus staff/employees—from the groundskeepers and kitchen workers to the top administrators.

At the Annual Meeting in June 2007 the SUAA Membership Committee introduced “Partnership 2007-08” in an effort to assist both the Central Office and Chapters. We asked Chapters to start out by recruiting new staff at their respective campuses beginning with the new academic year (Fall Semester) as well as existing staff and in March 2008 commence focusing on those anticipating retirement at the end of the academic year.

Chapters were also informed that commencing FY08 the Central Office would only be sending out the initial dues renewal notice followed by one reminder. In lieu of a second reminder the Central Office would send a listing of members who did not respond to either the renewal or reminder notices. This change was instituted to reduce the period of lapsed renewal. People have a tendency to forget after too long of a time lapse and are more apt to decide against maintaining membership.

PROCEDURE: The Central Office sends the initial dues notice 30 days prior to the anniversary/renewal date. When dues have not been received by the anniversary/renewal date, a reminder notice is sent as a follow up. If dues have not been received 30 days following the date of the reminder notice, a list of delinquent members will be sent to the chapter for further tracking (this is in lieu of a 2nd reminder from the Central Office).

Centralization of membership dues was initiated to assist chapters with a large membership base. However, centralization did not take away the chapters’ responsibility. Chapters still need to maintain a membership list, contact nonresponsive members, recruit new members, etc. The Central Office requested that chapters provide them with an updated membership listing to make sure records are accurate. Chapters need to have a handle on which members are not accounted for and the reason for same. This is especially important when annual paying members switch to dues deduction since this process can take at least a month and can easily slip through the cracks. Some members contribute to SUAAction and believe by doing so their membership is in good standing. Chapters **must** take responsibility for the accuracy of their membership lists and **provide** the Central Office with necessary information.

The Central Office has been and still is working to update their membership database. **Please** check to be sure all of your members are listed. If you have questions or concerns, the Central Office and the Membership Committee will be glad to answer any questions you may have.

SUAA membership has remained constant for almost a year. SUAA can no longer obtain names and addresses from SURS due to the privacy laws. However, Linda Brookhart has been communicating with the SURS staff in an effort to determine how they can be of assistance with a membership drive. SURS is willing to support us in our efforts and March happens to be a great time for SURS to assist us.

There are 60,000 or more who are the age of 40+ and still employed; thus, this group would be the best to target for membership. Our plans are to send a flyer to 28,000 + who have given SURS an e-mail address. SUAA will print a letter and provide envelopes to SURS who will add the names and addresses, stuff the envelope, and mail. SUAA will provide the postage. This can be done within a month. Furthermore, this **does not let**

- We now have established chapters on all the campuses of all 50-state supported campuses. We can't grow by adding members in new chapters.
- In the 3 years since I left the state board we have grown less than 1,000 members despite adding 6 more chapters. How many SURS retirees do you suppose there have been in those years?
- Membership to now peaked a year ago. This year's membership is down close to 1,000 from that year.

Why don't we get more members? Let me suggest a few reasons.

- Our name is confusing. Our name, though appropriate, is not self-illuminating. Outsiders, even those in our system ask, "What is a state universities annuitant anyway?"
- SUAA is too like SURS. Members of the retirement system think they are already SUAA members.
- Our organization is so diverse it is difficult to manage any overall program, except when our members panic over possible loss of benefits.
- Illinois is a large state and our chapters are spread throughout.
- Our chapters are so different in size, organization, and local campus setting and culture. Our 50 campuses range from small community colleges with only a few thousand students to the U of I at Urbana with over 42,000 students and the City Colleges of Chicago with 35,000 students over 7 separate campuses (we have just 376 members from CCC).
- Our campuses have very different administrations with very different attitudes about and different ties to SUAA.
- While we are all under the same retirement system, our health and other benefits are not the same. What is important to one group, does not apply to another.
- We represent all retirees. All workers in the system, academics, administrators, office staff, physical plant workers, and kitchen help. These different groups have had very little contact with one another in the past and have little in common socially. On large campuses they have never met one another.
- We represent people of all ages, current worker and retirees. Retirees themselves are of different ages and interest; active 60's, coasting 70's, struggling 80's. (Yet chapters are sometimes still in the hands of those in their late 70's and 80's).
- Perhaps most significant of all, our organization evolved from the grassroots up, so it's the campus chapters, not the central office that still dominates the organization.

Local chapters on one hand have been our strength, but they are also our weakness.

- Chapter members and other retirees on our campuses identify with the local chapter, not the state office. This has become the culture of our organization and will be hard to change.
- Often the local chapter is seen, first of all, as a social club dominated by faculty, administrators, and office heads. In your chapter how many members do you have that were in the campus police, the physical plant maintenance staff, the food service?

Let's look at ourselves as outsiders see us. Here are some of the impressions non-members have about us:

"SUAA-What is that all about?"

"About my pension, you say? I understand it's protected by the state constitution. So who needs SUAA?"

"The current members are carrying the ball, so I don't need to be involved."

"Springfield is such a mess- We can't do anything about it."

"Our chapter is a social club, and I don't need any more socializing."

"It's a social club, but not for the folks I socialize with."

"I'm a union member and the union lobbies for my benefits."

Put the above impressions together, and we have an image problem. Many employees don't know what we are about, and what they see seems irrelevant to them.

Does the apathy of most retirees really make a difference to SUAA's goals?

You bet it does.

- It's the difference between a lobby representing 14,000 members and one of 43,000 members or 180,000 members.
- With only 14,000 members we can't support a fully rounded central office to serve us.
- We're always strapped for cash.
- We're a puny lobbying force.

The key question for us now is: Given the above diversity of our chapters and SURS retirees, how are we going to enroll all retirees?

- We can start at our largest campuses: the two University of Illinois, Northern, SIU Carbondale, Illinois State, and City Colleges of Chicago.
- Listen to these figures
6 of our 50 chapters have less than 50 members
15 more have 50 to 100 chapters
In all, 43 of our 50 chapters have less than 500 members- together they total only 40.3% of our membership
Our 7 chapters at the largest state universities total 59.6% of our members
- The big chapters dominate our membership despite the fact that at none does chapter membership equal 50% of the total number of retirees.

We must get numbers up significantly on the large campuses if our membership is to grow. And that won't be easy. All of the problems of image and diversity are greatest on the large campuses.

- Chapter leaders see themselves, first as social clubs for faculty and administrators.
- They have trouble even getting faculty to join because they know so few outside their own department.
- No one recruits the civil service, police, physical plant, food services.
- Current employees have little interest in local retiree chapters.

Perhaps it is impossible to get 50% of retirees on those campuses, but we need to try to do even better than that. If we don't SUAA membership will not continue to grow.

We need to be developing working relations with the unions, with the police, the kitchen workers, and the maintenance workers on large campuses.

Personally, I don't think the university chapters can do the job recruiting on their campuses. If that is the case, we need a new strategy.

- We need to create and push new statewide, non-chapter membership.
- The change need not be an either or matter. Chapters may, and should, still continue for those comfortable with them.
- But we need a membership category for those who are not interested in the local chapter. They need to see that the organization is about statewide lobbying for our benefits, not about chapter activities.

In any case, unless we change our system of organization we will continue to limp along with a membership that represents well less than half SURS retirees, and we will not be doing an adequate job of protecting the benefits of SURS retirees.

- Every retiree and every employee must be educated to what our overriding purpose is and its importance to their benefits.
- The name of the membership game is at the state level, not the chapters.
- Local chapters are nice, but, if they can't get the members, we need to reorganize.
- Shifting from chapters to state membership will not be easy- it means a complete change in our established culture.

In other respects our organization does not operate efficiently.

- 3 board meetings are too many under our present system. They have become more social gatherings that focus on secondary topics rather than the most important issues.
- The follow-up is meager. Word does not get out to campus members about what is going on at state level.
- Chapters and the central office don't work well together on a day-to-day, month-to-month basis.
- Committees don't work well because they do not meet except at board meeting or by conference call.
- We need regional subgroups that are continuously in action.

We need to reorganize for the future.

- Our first concern should be to create and implement a viable membership development plan
- We need statewide membership
- We need regional subgroups
- We need a new clearly stated mission statement
- We need a plan of operation that will find a way to retain the advantages of local chapters in a world of state membership

Comments can be sent to linda@suaa.org.

Is your chapter in a rut?

Can't figure out how to increase your membership? No interest in attending chapter meetings? Membership down? No one stepping up to the plate to be officers? Need a program to present? Are you tired? Too much trouble? Need to revitalize? Who did you invite to participate? Take a look at your membership list? Who did you leave out? How do you communicate? Find out who is eligible!

Let the State Office help you out! We can visit your chapter! We can present ideas! We can help you get your membership rejuvenated.

Think numbers don't matter? Think again. Legislators like numbers; high numbers. Only want to be social? Fine, we can help you out there too.

Let us work on a plan to get your chapter moving. The State Membership Co-chairs are available to assist. Pat Smith (815.756.2227); Jan Cook (309.726.1664); and, Betty Hembrough (217.367.0628). All are successful in helping to build active chapters. Other members are able to assist too.

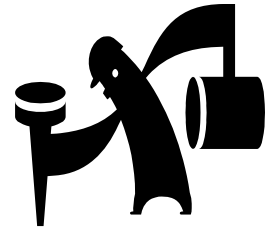
In order to be effective, SUAA needs support from everyone who is receiving SURS pensions and benefits.

GROWTH * MEMBERSHIP GROWTH * MEMBERSHIP



The State Universities Annuity Association isn't just for Retirees!

If you have a **STAKE** in Illinois pensions, you need a **STAKE** in **SUAA**!



CURRENT EMPLOYEES NEED **SUAA**!

This is a decision year for Illinois' Constitution and the Budget! Those of you whose retirements depend on payment of earned returns from state and federal programs are especially alert to talk of getting the State budget balanced and paying the government's debts.

Pension funding and healthcare issues will not diminish! The State of Illinois is in serious financial debt. Your benefits will continue to be a target. You can't afford to sit on the sidelines. It is time to join **SUAA** and be a part of a collective voice at the Capitol! Why now?

Too many members of the media and the legislature are not aware that -

- You are contributing to the SURS' pension plan throughout your working years: 8% of your income before taxes goes straight into the State's pension funds.
- Illinois has repeatedly failed to meet its obligations to support employee pension plans, which is in violation of its own legislated contribution program.
- Those of you who have worked under Social Security as well as SURS are subject to the Windfall Elimination and Pension Offset penalties which sharply reduce the Social Security benefits of anyone who also receives a pension from another program.
- The State Employee Health Plan and the College Insurance Program in Illinois need to be revised in order to assure adequate funding. Both of these programs need to be professionally managed.
- The Illinois Constitution currently protects earned pension benefits. This could change if the voters say YES to a Constitutional Convention in November.

YOU NEED TO HELP PROTECT YOUR PENSION INVESTMENTS

Show your support by investing in **SUAA**!

SUAA advocates on your behalf!

SUAA's actions keep the legislators and policymakers knowledgeable about your issues. **SUAA's** power is related to the number of people represented! Membership matters. Large numbers matter! Your membership and that of your spouse matter! Join **SUAA** in keeping your pension and benefits in the forefront of the legislators! **Join today!**

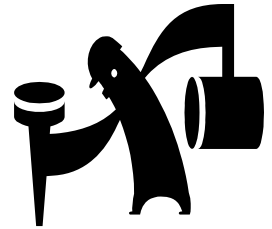
Member dues are less than 10 cents per day. "It's worth it." Send your membership form to:

The State Universities Annuity Association
3085 Stevenson Drive, Suite 301
Springfield, Illinois 62703

Have Questions? Need Answers? Call 217.585.2370 or email suaa@suaa.org

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Won't you join us?

Linda L. Brookhart
Executive Director

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