

CSU, Fresno Emeriti and Retirees Association

CONNECTIONS

Newsletter #5

Spring 2014

Luncheon: President Castro

The Friday May 23 luncheon of CSU, Fresno's Emeriti & Retirees Association (ERA) will be held at Marie Calendar's restaurant (Cedar at Shaw avenues) from 11:00 a.m. to about 2:00 p.m. The standup "meet and greet" session occurs during the first half hour before we sit down to order our lunches. The meal is free for members of the CSU Emeriti & Retired Faculty Association (ERFA). Prospective joiners are welcome as guests for lunch. No formal business meeting is scheduled following this luncheon, but ERA President Quadro will briefly update the members on matters of interest to the membership that the Executive Committee has recently considered. The usual Q&A session following the guest speaker presentation can be expanded for discussion of pending issues that ERFA is tracking as well as matters of interest by members of our local affiliate, ERA.

CSU, Fresno President Joseph I. Castro accepted the invitation to speak at our Spring luncheon. He assumed the reigns of leadership in August 2013 and his formal investiture as the 8th president of our campus occurs on Saturday May 10. Dr. Castro will be presiding over his first Commencement Exercises on Saturday May 17. During his inaugural year at Fresno State he has declared "Student Success" to be his number one priority. He is expected to address this goal at the luncheon as well as speak to his vision of the campus going forward, his retrospective on the 2013-14 academic year, and the role of emeriti and retirees in support of the university's mission.

President's Report

This is the first of what I intend will be an ongoing report to the membership of our local ERFA affiliate, the CSU Fresno Emeriti and Retirees Association.

Our Fall luncheon last November was attended by 30 people, including members and guests. Our speaker, Alan Wade, provided insights into his role as ERFA's advocate on governmental actions and issues facing retirees in the coming months and years. The latter included the latest attempt at pension reform via the initiative process, led by San Jose Mayor Chuck Reed, and Cal PERS proposals to post data on retirees on its web site. The first is currently inactive; the second is undergoing significant modification. Both issues were addressed in the March 2014 edition of ERFA's newsletter, *The Reporter*.

Your Executive Committee met on March 3, 2014 to discuss a number of matters. The major items were, first, to examine our fiscal situation. While our treasury is in good shape because of the funds accumulated during the seventeen years of inactivity, we are currently spending more that we receive in dues rebates from ERFA, our only source of funding. This is because of the expense of our two luncheons a year. While change is not immediately needed, this is an issue we will have to address in the future. Second, efforts to reestablish a relationship with the campus are continuing. We will have more on that later. Finally, we discussed the need to continue our efforts to recruit new members and to focus on recent retirees. We have gained a few new members as a result of inviting guests to attend our luncheon, and intend to continue that effort and well as encouraging individual outreach by our members.

Lastly, I received notification last month that Isabel Kaprielian-Churchill (Emerita of History) received a grant award from ERFA in support of research for her book, currently titled *Armenian Orphans of the Genocide: The Georgetown Children*. This is the second grant award to one of our retirees in the past two years. Al Evans (Emeritus of Political Science) received an award in March 2012 in support of his work on civil society and protest movements in Russia. Congratulations to both.

PROFILE: Professor Emeritus Robert Merrill, Geologist

Dr. Merrill, formerly chair of the Earth and Environmental Sciences Department, was a prominent member of the faculty (1970 to 2004). He was very active in "Shared Governance" of the university as a member of the Academic Senate and the General Education Committee, which he chaired. He also served on various task forces of the Senate and the Administration. His most visible role in the campus community was as the twice elected President of the C.F.A. union, charged with defending faculty rights of professors and lecturers under the collective bargaining agreement with the CSU system.

Robert is a 3rd generation Californian. He spent his first few years living in Death Valley, where his father was a Captain in the CCC constructing roads during the 1930s and 40s. Both parents were raised on farms and shared a love of the outdoors. This early upbringing stimulated Robert's attraction to geology and related field work; and it fostered a deep appreciation of and concern for the environment.

He earned his B.A. at UC Riverside, his M.S. at U. Mass., and his Ph.D. at the University of Texas, where his dissertation focused on Wyoming's Big Horn Basin --- examining how tectonic uplift and climate change affected the course of the Greybull River over two million years. Previously, Robert was hired during summers by energy and mineral companies to do field work in Alaska and North Carolina.

As a professor of geology at CSU, Fresno Dr. Merrill did research on lava flows at Table Mountain, the fluvial deposits of Little Table Mountain, transitional sediments from the Sierra Nevada to the San Joaquin Valley, sedimentary deposits in the Ketterman Hills area, and glacial remains around Lake Tahoe --- all involving graduate students. He also consulted on water and land use in the Valley and advised archeologists on soils and sediments at pre-historic and historic Native American sites in central California. He taught geology and led field trips in Fresno State's 'Semester Abroad' program in New Zealand and Australia.

As a retiree three main themes are professional interests, personal avocations, and civic activism. Regarding the first, he has combined a fascination with geology with a love of international travel. In January 2013 he joined 100 geologists from around the world on a specialized tour of the Falkland Islands, South Georgia island in the South Atlantic and Antarctica on a Russian icebreaker that was organized by the Geological Society of America. In August of 2014 Robert will be on a geological tour of Scotland with fellow scientists. He has inspected famous geological sites abroad such as: the Atacama Desert, the Andes Mountains, Patagonia, and Terra del Fuego in Chile and Argentina; Mt. Etna in Sicily; and the great African Rift in Tanzania and Kenya.

Robert's second passion integrates his love of history and interest in anthropology with his professional knowledge of geology. He is drawn to primitive art and crafts of Native America, Africa, and the South Pacific. His hobby is collecting authentic Native American wood carvings (especially masks), sculptures, pottery, paintings, textiles, and jewelry.

A third driving force in Robert's retirement is civic activism. He points to the geology program at the University of Texas, where the professors stressed the ethic of "using knowledge of geology to protect the public interest" --- especially regarding environmental matters such as water sources, land use, energy production, and now climate change as they relate to population, agriculture, and the environment. Consequently, Dr. Merrill has orchestrated film series on water

and energy at Fresno's Unitarian Church as part of its community outreach effort. He also co-chairs the church's Town Hall series of guest speakers on matters of social and environmental justice. Robert utilizes his expertise for the common good through prepared testimony on community issues that come before the Fresno City Council and the Fresno County Board of Supervisors. He writes occasional commentaries that appear on the opinion page of the Fresno Bee. Particularly noteworthy was his successful effort to prevent commercial encroachment upon the urban Sugar Pine Trail. He has made numerous power point presentations to civic, educational, and environmental organizations such as the League of Women Voters, Community Colleges, and the Sierra Club --- the local chapter of which recently honored him with its 2014 Community Service Award!

Speaker Summary at Fall 2013 Luncheon



Dr. Alan Wade, Director of CSU-ERFA's Legislative Affairs Committee {See professional biography and ERFA responsibilities in the Fall 2013 issue of "Connections"}, focused his presentation on three areas: ERFA watchdog and advocacy in Sacramento; pension reform efforts via ballot initiative; and privacy threats involving CalPERS compliance with the Public Records Act. The status of the latter two topics was referenced in the President's Report by Dave Quadro (see page 1). Regarding the first item, Alan described his role in monitoring the political landscape and how ERFA representatives attend meetings of a loose-knit alliance of public employee unions (called "Score") that shares information and sometimes coordinates responses to proposals and actions that may be detrimental to public employee interests, such as pension and health care programs. However, these unions tend to be more concerned about issues relevant to current employees and less focused on priorities of retirees, though the interests of the two classes are often intertwined. Dr. Wade concluded his remarks by reminding retirees to "stay in touch" with your local assembly and senate representatives to educate them about important issues that the ERFA newsletter "Reporter" covers, and be plugged into the media (print and online) for the latest developments.

Long Term Care Insurance Changes

Leading up to the May 9, 2014 CalPERS deadline for selecting among the options offered, LTC policy holders face difficult tradeoffs in deciding the years of coverage, the level of benefits, inflation protection, and premium payments that best suit their situation. The dilemma confronted by California public employees and retirees is not dissimilar to what LTC policy holders insured by commercial providers have been facing. An excellent article on this topic appeared in the January/February 2014 issue of Consumers Digest; it is entitled: "Long-Term-Care Insurance: Not Going According to Plan; Fewer Choices; Higher Premiums, Limited Coverage" (pages 23-26). It provides context for understanding why CalPERS is changing the rules of the game. In discussing the LTC insurance industry, CalPERS modifications to LTC insurance are mentioned. During the last few years industry premiums have risen at least 50% on average for consumers who purchased LTC policies ten to twenty years ago. Life time coverage is no longer available to new buyers --- the maximum now being 10 years. Thus, as painful as the choices are and as angry as policy holders may be about broken promises, the actions of CalPERS seem consistent with the industry as a whole.

One fact reported is worth keeping in mind when choosing a different type of LTC coverage. A 2005 study, which was cited in a 2012 report by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, showed that "roughly 70% of people experience sufficient functional disability that requires assistance with daily living skills after they turn 65. On average they require about 3 years of help." To qualify for benefits, the policy-holder industry-wide typically must provide evidence that at least two basic activities of daily life can't be done independently.

ERA NEWSLETTER STAFF	FRESNO STATE ERA CONTACT INFORMATION	
Writer/Editor: John Shields Producer: William Stock Contact editor at: iohnshi@csufresno.edu	Our new mailing address is: Emeriti & Retiree Association P.O. Box # 25873 Fresno, CA 93729 – 5873	Questions, concerns, or ideas about ERA should be sent to: President Dave Quadro davidq@mail.fresnostate.edu