

UNIVERSITY OF WEST GEORGIA
ASSOCIATION OF RETIRED FACULTY and STAFF
2024-2025 ANNUAL REPORT

Submitted by Micheal Crafton, ARFS President, ARFS Coordinating Council

April 3, 2026

INTRODUCTION

The annual report has been a requirement since March 22, 2019, when the University of West Georgia (UWG) Association of Retired Faculty and Staff (ARFS) Coordinating Council amended its Bylaws to state that the President of the Council should “prepare a report of ARFS activities to submit annually to the Vice President of Advancement and other administrative offices as appropriate” (Article 5, Section 2 (h)). Previous annual reports for the years 2017-18, 2018-19, 2019-20, 2020-21, 2021-22, 2022-23, and 2023-2024 were approved by the Coordinating Council and then distributed to various offices in UWG. The reports are archived and can be accessed through the ARFS web site in the documents section. This the eighth such report covers the period from the October meeting in 2024 to the October meeting in 2025.

ARFS OVERVIEW

As stated in previous reports the purposes of the UWG Association of Retired Faculty and Staff are to:

- promote the well-being of its members
- support the University of West Georgia retiree community
- foster continued involvement of retirees in the mission of the university
- facilitate communication between the university and its retirees
- seek to promote the scholarly, social, and cultural interests of the retiree community
- address matters related to benefits and resources for retirees

Active membership includes faculty and staff who have retired from UWG and meet the established Board of Regents retirement criteria. There also is an Associate membership category for other individuals who meet certain criteria. There were approximately 646

members receiving electronic or hard-copy communications from ARFS (based on distribution of materials in October 2023).

The officers of the Association are as follows: president, vice-president, past president, secretary, and treasurer. The officers are elected by the membership at the ARFS general membership meeting (part of the Annual Retiree Reunion) held each fall. The officers and at least six at-large members (also elected at the same event) comprise the Coordinating Council, which provides leadership for the association and directs its activities on behalf of the membership.

Much of the information generated and activities reported on can be found on the ARFS website. There one can find the Bylaws, minutes of meetings, and annual reports for ARFS. Also, retirees and potential retirees can find a wealth of information directly and links and phone numbers to get even more information especially about their benefits (Medicare, Health Savings Account, Social Security, TRS, TIAA-CREF, etc.).

An ARFS brochure was prepared in fall 2018 to provide information about what ARFS is, how one becomes a member, and the activities and benefits of membership. It was updated/revised in 2023 to reflect a variety of changes needed and a translation of the brochure in Spanish (by Cecilia Lee) was also produced. The Spanish version is not on the website as of this writing.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF RETIREES TO THE UNIVERSITY AND THE COMMUNITY

Bobby R. Painter, Jr., Database Administrator in University Advancement, reported the following revised/corrected data about UWG retiree giving to the University during this reporting period:

Below is an accounting of the financial contributions made to ARFS and UWG retirees by the University. There are two ways that donations are recorded, personal retiree giving and tributes given in honor of retirees, combining these two amounts per fiscal results in an all-time total of **\$6,650,261.59**, with the last six years as follows:

2021	\$849,618.33
2022	\$122,388.45
2023	\$1,441,341.96
2024	\$1,093,190.44
2025	\$63,310.55
2026	\$75,455.10

ARFS created and endowed the **UWG Retiree Legacy Scholarship** to benefit in perpetuity deserving University of West Georgia students who are direct descendants or immediate family relations of retired faculty or staff members. The scholarship (\$1,395.31) was awarded in 2025 to Claire Jennings, a junior majoring in French and on the education certification track, who is the granddaughter of retiree Chester Gibson, best known at UWG for his role as debate coach. Information about the scholarship and award criteria can be found at <https://www.westga.edu/hr/arfs/retiree-legacy-scholarship.php>

Another way in which retirees contribute financially to the University is through establishment of endowments and endowed scholarships by individual retirees or by others in their honor. In 2023 (with the invaluable assistance of Allyson Bretch, MaKena Burns, Ketty Cusick, and Bobby Painter), a list of scholarships or endowments named for or created by retirees was compiled and distributed (at the Annual Reunion) is provided in Appendix A of the 2022-2023 Annual Report. The list shows the broad range of the funding that has come into being over many years by retirees of West Georgia College or the University of West Georgia, or by others who sought to honor notable contributions by persons retired from West Georgia. Most of these designated funds continue to serve as a significant resource for students (even decades after they were first established).

Individual retirees continue to be involved with UWG, including serving on University committees and volunteering for activities (e.g., helping with graduation, fundraising, judging competitions, and providing needed information for Faculty Senate committees developing policy affecting retirees). Participation lessened during the pandemic but has resumed in this current reporting period. Some retired faculty members stay active professionally through writing, presentations, professional organization leadership, and other activities in their fields, representing UWG as they do so. Information about some of these activities can be found in issues of *The Rejuvenator* (the ARFS newsletter), which are available online at the ARFS site. Many of the activities specifically sponsored by ARFS, which are outlined later in this report, also serve to support UWG and/or the surrounding community.

ARFS STRUCTURE

ARFS Bylaws

The most up-to-date version of ARFS Bylaws can be found in the Document and Resource Center on the ARFS website. Following a discussion of revisions needed since the document was last updated in 2020, a revised version of the Bylaws was unanimously approved at the Coordinating Council meeting held on 9-8-23.

ARFS Coordinating Council

The Coordinating Council is comprised of elected retirees and representatives from relevant UWG administrative areas who serve as ex-officio members. During the time covered by this report, Lauren Niedringhaus continued until her departure from the University to serve helpfully and effectively as the official liaison to ARFS from Human Resources, attending Council meetings on occasion. Since she also served as the Benefits coordinator working with retirees, this has allowed for more coordination of efforts between ARFS and the Offices of Human Resources. After Ms. Niedringhaus, Ms. Hope Cole was assigned the task of ARFS HR Liaison.

Also, during this time, Beverly Dittmer, in HR, handled updates for the ARFS website and kept track of financial paperwork for the group.

Makena Burns in Alumni and Constituent Engagement worked more closely with ARFS on organizational matters related to the Annual Reception/Reunion; she in turn was replaced temporarily by Kate Petty from that same division; Julia Key is now the designated replacement for MaKena. Both Kate and Julia worked on the 2025 Reunion.

Officers during 2024-2025 were as follows:

- President – Micheal Crafton (2024-2026)
- Past President – Anne Richards (2024-2026)
- Vice President/President-Elect – Clois Reese (2024-2026)
- Secretary – Meg Cooper (2024-2026)
- Treasurer – Rolanda Farmer (2024-2026)

At-Large Members

- Lisa Ledbetter (2024-2026)
- Cecilia Lee (2024-2026)
- Ann McCleary (2025-2027)
- Jerry Mock (2024-2026)
- Patricia Pinkard (2024-2026)
- Mike Renfrow (2024-2026)
- Sally Roberts (2025-2027)
- Francie Taylor (2025-2027)
- Trish Wells (2024-2026)

Current members of the Council are identified on the ARFS website

ARFS Coordinating Council Committees

The ARFS Bylaws establish the following standing committees:

Nominating Committee – The Nominating Committee recommends ARFS members for Council positions that will become vacant. Past President Anne Richards will chair this committee. Other required members are the current President (Micheal Crafton) and Vice President/President-Elect (Clois Reese). Two other members of the Council who are not officers will serve as well, but this will be decided later.

Programs/Events Committee – This committee is responsible for building and delivering programs of interest to ARFS members, including the annual reunion. Members serving this year were Meg Cooper, Rolanda Farmer, Ann McCleary, Anne Richards, Francie Taylor, and Trish Wells. The Council Vice President/President-Elect (Clois Reese) was an ex-officio member of this committee.

Scholarship Committee – While ARFS does not have any input into selection of the Retiree Legacy Scholarship awardee, we have one person on this committee who tries to help facilitate communication about the scholarship. Jerry Mock ~~has agreed to continue to~~ served in this role.

Widow/Widower/Surviving Partner Committee – This committee focuses on enhancing the relationship of widows/widowers/surviving partners with ARFS and UWG. It is not currently active. We do refer these individuals to a support group on campus and to other resources.

Newsletter Committee – This committee produces our newsletter, *The Rejuvenator*. Anne continues the lead on this committee this year. Additional Council members serving this year were Meg Cooper, Rolanda Farmer, and Ann McCleary.

The Council president (Micheal Crafton) is an ex-officio member of all committees.

ARFS ACTIVITIES

ARFS supports the University's mission and values and seeks to foster closer relations between retirees and the University. ARFS 2024-2025 activities that meet the purposes of the association are highlighted in this report.

ARFS Coordinating Council Meetings

Three meetings, all held in person, took place during the period covered by this report. The minutes for the meetings listed below are available online in the Document Center section of the UWG ARFS webpage at <https://www.westga.edu/hr/arfs/document-center.php>. (Minutes are posted only after they are approved by the Council at a subsequent Council meeting.) In the minutes, one can find the names of the members

and the attendance and responses to each agenda item. Below are just a few highlights from each meeting.

- January 24, 2025 (held at the Neva Lomason Library multi-purpose room).
 - At the January meeting there was, as is nearly always the case for the January meeting, a debriefing of the annual reunion and joint celebration of retirees held in October. There were 58 attending, and in general the council deemed the event a success; there was much discussion about how to increase the attendance.
 - In addition to reviewing the October event, there was the need to reset the membership of the standing committees, to discuss the future activities, and to plan for content submission to the newsletter.
 - Faculty emeriti policy was also discussed because there are concerns about procedure and the meaning of emerita/us status; this was particularly relevant because the Board staff at the USG had also been developing and / or refining their policy for emeriti. (Although that process seems to have been halted.)
 - The constant agenda items for the meetings are staying on top of the Legacy Scholarship, working on communication among the members and between ARFS and the University, planning events to help aspiring retirees, and planning for the annual reunion and celebration event.
- March 21, 2024 (held at the Neva Lomason Library multi-purpose room).
 - The March meeting is generally the meeting to report on and plan for events on campus or with other retiree associations prior to the summer.
 - At this March meeting we had a visit by Interim President Ashwani Monga. Dr. Monga came and spent a fair amount of time articulating a good case for the importance of the retirees to the University and a promise of a mutually beneficial relationship in the future.
 - Other events discussed were as follows: Weekend Alumni and Friends events, the College of Education's 50th anniversary celebration event, and meetings of USG-RC and GA-HERO in and around the state.
 - There was also a more focused discussion of the upcoming reunion and celebration of retirees.
- July 11, 2024 (held at the Neva Lomason Library multi-purpose room).
 - The July meeting includes an intentional discussion about the October event mentioned above. Usually, this is the last meeting before the event.

- Also, a new representative, Kate Petty, was welcomed by the Council, and as always it is good and useful to have a new representative who shows genuine interest in the development of ARFS.
- There was also a good bit of discussion about the Legacy scholarship and soliciting content matter for the newsletter.

Coordinating Council Projects Related to Benefits and Campus Email

***UWG Benefits Fair.** ARFS participated in UWG’s annual Benefits Fair, held on October 22, 2025, at the Coliseum. The ARFS table displayed a variety of items pertaining to ARFS and preparation for retirement, including the ARFS pamphlet (in both English and Spanish) and the summary pamphlet *Steps to Retirement for Faculty/Staff*. (A copy of this pamphlet - also revised and updated in 2023 - is available in the Document Center section of the ARFS webpage.) Council members Meg Cooper, Micheal Crafton, Anne Richards, and Francie Taylor took turns staffing the table.

Activities Related to Maintaining Communication with Retirees

Following a sustained and productive effort focused on retaining communication with UWG retirees following their migration from campus email, ARFS has succeeded in its efforts to reach most retirees of UWG.

- **ARFS Website:** UWG’s Office of Human Resources hosts the ARFS website (found at <https://www.westga.edu/hr/arfs/>). This website contains a lot of information about ARFS and its components, including copies of *The Rejuvenator*, some information about retiree accomplishments, meeting minutes, and various resources for retirees.
- **Email Listserv.** Inclusion on the ARFS listserv provides retiree members with important reminders and university news (when it is made available to us). Obituaries are also shared when those working on the listserv learn of the passing of a UWG retiree. ARFS members may also use the listserv to exchange information, raise questions or concerns, and make announcements of interest to their fellow retirees. Past President Anne Richards maintained and updated listserv membership. Approximately 426 retiree members were included in this listserv at the end of this reporting period; another 220 received information via regular mail, so 646 retirees receive the communication.
- **Newsletter: *The Rejuvenator*.** Three issues of the newsletter were distributed in the reporting year, winter and spring. The issues of *The Rejuvenator* can be seen on the USG ARFS website at <https://www.westga.edu/hr/arfs/rejuvenator-newsletter.php>.
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INTERFACE WITH STATE AND INTERNATIONAL RETIREE ORGANIZATIONS

GA-HERO

Donna McCarty and David Boyd were elected as co-presidents of GA-HERO in June of 2024. Both lived in Valdosta, GA. Unfortunately, on September 27, 2024, a powerful hurricane hit Valdosta and destroyed both of their houses. The organization thought it was covered in case of emergencies by the election of co-presidents, but in this case BOTH were impacted simultaneously. Neither recovered from these devastating losses during their term in office and no meeting of GA-HERO took place in the time frame covered by this report. Subsequently, remaining executive committee members of GA-HERO discussed the situation and made plans for an election of new co-presidents to take place in Spring of 2026.

University System of Georgia Retiree Council (USGRC)

Two meetings of the USGRC were held during the period covered by this report.

April 4, 2025 – a meeting was held in person at Clayton State University and simultaneously online. It was attended by Anne Richards (voting member), Meg Cooper (alternate), and Kathryn Grams. Kathryn was then a member of the USG Well-Being Funding Review Committee.

At this meeting, Chancellor of the University System of Georgia, Sonny Perdue, recognized retiree contributions to the USG and provided an overview of the success experienced in higher education in Georgia.

Health care coverage updates and a report from the Total Rewards Steering Committee was provided by Joe Strong, Associate Vice Chancellor of Total Rewards. He indicated that for both active employees and pre-65 retirees, medical costs continued to escalate. The USG had adopted several cost-mitigating strategies but was facing the possibility of reducing the HRA benefit for post-65 retirees within the coming months.

Karin Elliott, Vice Chancellor of Human Resources summarized the report related to the possibility of merging two existing retirement plans in the state, The State Health Benefits Plan (SHBP) and the USG Plan. An exploration of this possibility determined that a merger would cost the USG \$77 million annually, Karin stated that, as a result of this finding, no merger was currently under consideration.

Interim Chief Academic Officer, Dr. Costas Spirou, provided an update on the state of the University System of Georgia.

The meeting also included a customary presentation by the Alight Retiree Health Insurance Benefit team.

Other reports were from the USG Staff Council (via its President Jessie McGinty) regarding the development of a Staff Council Toolkit to standardize practices systemwide, and reports from the Retirement Advisory and Investment Committee (by Dorothy Zinsmeister) and the Communications Committee (by Martha Wicker).

Attendees were informed that, as of the October 18, 2024 meeting, summaries of USGRC meeting notes instead of the complete minutes will be posted online. Full minutes will only be available from USGRC representatives or Executive Committee members. (NOTE: Full minutes taken by Anne Richards are provided on the UWG ARFS website.)

The report of the Nominating Committee was unanimously approved, with Tom Jackson (University of Georgia) becoming Chair for 2025-2026 and Meg Cooper (University of West Georgia) becoming chair elect. Ted Wadley (Georgia State University) was continued as secretary.

October 10, 2025 – this meeting took place on the campus of the University of Georgia, both in person and online. It was attended by Micheal Crafton (voting representative), Anne Richards (alternate), and Meg Cooper (chair-elect, USGRC).

President Jere W. Morehead, President of UGA welcomed the group and Juanita Hicks, Vice President and Chief Human Resources officer at UGA – former head of HR at the University of West Georgia – addressed the group. Morehead emphasized the importance of the USGRC in continuing to attract capable faculty and staff who had confidence they would be valued and supported in their employment as well as their retirement. Juanita Hicks spoke about the differences in perspective and culture on different campuses in the USG.

Dr. Paul Jones, President of Ft. Valley State University, and chair of the Total Rewards Steering Committee, described the talent and expertise associated with this Committee and the challenging job it has of ensuring the choices in healthcare plans are sustainable and of value to both retirees and current employees.

The ALIGHT USG Leadership team reported on trends in healthcare and ways in which ALIGHT has worked to maximize value for retirees as well as to educate them on the importance of reviewing their healthcare coverage annually.

Martha Wicker discussed serious questions retirees at Clayton State University had about some communications received from ALIGHT.

Karin Elliott explained the rationale for the decision to reduce the amount of the HRA stipend from \$2,640 to \$2,484 – a reduction of \$156 annually beginning in 2026. Her

remarks supported statements made by Dr. Jones regarding the challenging situation the system is facing regarding escalating healthcare costs.

Joe Strong highlighted portions of the annual (August) presentation to the Board of Regents on healthcare matters/plans and provided a slide indicating healthcare costs are projected to increase by 12.1% in 2026 as compared to 2025. The good news is that retirees now pay less than they formerly did for prescription drugs, with a cap of \$2,000 in 2025.

It was reported that ALIGHT is now the “system of record” for all retirees through a data management system. If retirees need to update an address or other information, they do so by phoning or logging into ONEUSG. It was also stressed that retirees should update ALIGHT (through the portal) if they change their personal email.

No reports were given from representatives of the Faculty Council or the Staff Council.

A discussion took place regarding the fact that several institutions in the USG had no organized retiree organization on their campuses, a situation that will hopefully be remedied for the well-being and benefit of their retirees.

Nominations were invited for Chair-Elect and Secretary (2026-2027). It was announced that the Spring meeting of the USGRC would take place on the campus of the University of West Georgia, with Meg Cooper presiding.

ARFS is an official voting member of the Georgia Association of Higher Education Retiree Organizations (GA-HERO) and the University System of Georgia Retiree Council (USGRC) and is a member as well of the international Association of Retirement Organizations in Higher Education (AROHE).

ANNUAL REUNION AND ARFS GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

The Programs/Events Committee (Meg Cooper, Rolanda Farmer, Ann McCleary, Anne Richards, Francie Taylor, and Trish Wells) did the bulk of the planning for and implementation of ARFS’ big annual event, held this year on October 18, 2025. Also, this year ARFS and the Events Committee enjoyed the support of both HR and Advancement in planning and executing this in-person event. Arrangements were made through Alumni and Constituent Engagement to hold the event in the Campus Center Ballroom. A photographer associated with University Communications and Marketing (Hailey Wilkinson) took over 500 photos.

The event consists of a retiree reunion, recognition of recent retirees, and ARFS general membership meeting. This event was held in person in the Campus Center Ballroom. We had 56 attendees, counting UWG personnel. There were 48 registrants, most of whom registered via phone/email instead of through the Alumni portal. As with other years, we

had a few no-shows and a few walk-ins. Nine retirees (of 22 being honored) attended and received their medallions from Micheal.

Meg Cooper introduced Claire Jennings, a junior majoring in French and on the education certification track, who is the granddaughter of retiree Chester Gibson, best known at UWG for his role as debate coach. Kate Petty, Director of Alumni & Constituent Engagement, thanked Claire and spoke about the Alumni and Friends Travel Program, including information about upcoming trips. The program also had a display table at the event. Meg Cooper introduced Cecilia Lee, an at-large Coordinating Council member, who read her poem, "A Toast to the New UWG Retirees." This was followed by presentation of medallions by Micheal Crafton, assisted by past-president Anne Richards, to the recent retirees who were present: David Boldt, Swarna Dutt, Camilla Gant, Scott Groninger, Donna Haley, Suzanne Horton, Tami Oglethorpe, Alvin Jerome Paige, and Sherri Shelnut Smith. Meg Cooper introduced each honoree and provided a little background information as they came on stage. Retirees were given an opportunity to speak to the group if they wished, and seven of them did so.

There was a nice slideshow that had been prepared by UWG personnel. Catering was well done. ARFS, Alumni Travel, and Library Special Collections had display tables. The photo booth was a big success. Most Council members participated and some supplied materials for the event at their own expense. Photos from this event and a pdf copy of the annual tribute booklet for 2024-2025 retirees can be found on the ARFS website on the Annual Reunion page.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

The ARFS Coordinating Council decided early in 2022 that we should include financial information in the annual report.

Financial contributions of and related to retirees were addressed earlier in the CONTRIBUTIONS OF RETIREES TO THE UNIVERSITY AND THE COMMUNITY section of this report.

ARFS Treasurer, Sally Robert kept track of financial expenditures related to ARFS activities during the period covered by this report.

AROHE – To maintain its membership in AROHE, The UWG Association of Retired Faculty and Staff pays annual dues of \$120/year. The membership fee was last paid on 6-1-24.

The REJUVENATOR – Three issues of our newsletter are typically published during the period covered by this report. Services provided by UWG Print Services related to the newsletter include set-up of the newsletter, printing hard copies that are mailed out to a portion of the membership, and addressed envelopes used in mailing the newsletter.

The costs for each issue of the newsletter comes to around \$600.00 per issue. The complete costs for three 2025 newsletters are presented below.

Winter 2025: Newsletters	\$240.23
Envelopes printed for mailing	\$113.73
Rejuvenator Insert	\$182.21
Tax	\$ 37.53
Postage costs	\$ 43.14
Total	\$616.84
Spring 2025: Newsletters	\$240.23
Envelopes printed for mailing	\$ 70.10
Rejuvenator Insert	\$182.21
Tax	\$ 34.48
Postage costs	\$ 0
Total	\$527.02
Fall 2025: Newsletters	\$254.74
Envelopes printed for mailing	\$ 70.34
Rejuvenator Insert	\$172.79
Tax	\$ 0
Postage costs	\$ 0
Total	\$497.87
Grand Total	\$1,641.73

Annual Reunion/Recognition of Retirees/Reception/ARFS membership meeting COSTS

Invitations, commemorative tribute booklets and medallions: Commemorative tribute booklets are printed through UWG Print Services for each retiree, each tribute writer, and attendees at the annual reunion and recognition of retiree event. Copies are also sent to the UWG Archives (via Blynné Olivieri Parker) and to pertinent administrators, with any extras shared with prospective retirees.

Invoice for invitations -- \$261.59

Invoice for booklets -- \$233.17

Invoice for medallions, also including a couple other items ordered at the same time — I calculated that our share of the invoice is \$235.40
2 Invoices related to Post Reunion distribution of materials — printing (\$42.34) and mailing (\$42.44), for a total of \$84.78

Of course, the largest charge was for Dine West — \$1,435.59.

Therefore, the total expenditure from Alumni for the 2025 Retiree Reunion was \$2,250.53

Respectfully submitted,

Micheal Crafton, ARFS Coordinating Council President (2024-2026)

University of West Georgia Association of Retired Faculty & Staff