



SCARE Newsletter

Sonoma County Association of Retired Employees

Published Quarterly February 2026 Volume 326 Issue 1

Calendar of Events 2026

Membership Meetings

2/24/26, 5/26/26, 8/25/26,
11/17/26

Meetings are at 1pm at
Finley Center and on Zoom

Board Meetings

12:00 PM Dates may change
so call Board member first.

3/4/26, 5/8/26, 7/1/26,
9/2/26, 11/4/26

Get Newsletter by Email:

Many members have agreed
to get notices and
newsletters via email. This
saves money and trees and
lets us get info to you more
quickly. Plus you can
increase the font size for
easier reading!! If you are
willing to get notices and the
newsletter via email, send an
email to
communications@sonomacountyretirees.com authorizing
SCARE to send them to you.
Please add that address to
your address book so spam
filters let it through. If you
would like to get the
newsletter both by email and
by USPS, contact Lou
Maricle
(maricles2@gmail.com)

The SCARE Newsletter is printed quarterly. The information printed in the newsletter is believed to be accurate and from reliable sources. However, no responsibility is assumed by SCARE, the Editor, or the writers for inaccuracies in the articles as published.

President's Message by Kathy Young

It has been a very busy few years for the SCARE Board. We conducted two member surveys, one to find out what was most important to you (Cost-of-Living Adjustment [COLA]) and second to gauge the impact of not having COLA since 2008. We then focused on COLA/insurance contribution. We supported Sonoma County Employees Retirement Association (SCERA) in changing their policies to make it easier to implement COLAs once the Board of Supervisors (BOS) decided to do so. SCARE Board members met with each Supervisor and the County Administrator (CAO), we have attended many BOS meetings to make presentations and reinforce the need for COLA/insurance contribution. We have written many letters to Human Resources, CAO, and BOS regarding the impact of not having a COLA including asking them to inform prospective hires that there has not been a COLA given in 18 years. We heard from many members that if given that choice, they would have gone to another county to work. Legislative changes are needed to move forward with some kind of COLA since the BOS is unwilling to bring all retirees up to 80% of their purchasing power, which is in the current legislation. Recently Chris Rogers introduced Legislative bill AB 1601, and it will hopefully make it to the legislative queue for action this year.

We continue to advocate for Sonoma County retirees; we are starting a Political Action Committee (PAC) to have more local political influence. We continue to press the BOS to address county retiree issues. We are updating our website and improving our social media presence. Our newsletter is always full of very useful information.

I have had the privilege of working with this dedicated group of volunteers as the President of SCARE for the past three years and will remain on the board as Secretary/Immediate Past President. Please join me in welcoming **Andre Bercut** as our incoming President. This board will continue to work hard, putting in many hours, to support Sonoma County retirees. My heartfelt thanks go out to this dedicated group.

At our next SCARE Membership Meeting, Bo Carr from AMBA will be our speaker. See page 2 for more details. We will also be discussing and voting on the PAC. Language to be voted on is shown on page 2.

Our February Membership meeting will be held at 1:00 PM on February 24, 2026, in person at the Finley Center Cypress room or by Zoom. The Zoom information is: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/8954632781?omn=83007426292>, Meeting ID: 895 463 2781, Dial by your location: +1 669 444 9171 US.

Board of Directors

Officers

President — Andre Bercut

707 303-6413

andre.bercut@gmail.com

Vice President — Paul Carroll

707 559-0588

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Secretary & Immediate Past President — Kathy Young

707 539-8027

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707 795-6926

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Directors at Large

Alix Shor

Chris Bauer

Ed Clites

Shaun Du Fossee

Lou Maricle

Sherry Parr

Vacant

Retirement Board Retiree Reps

Mark Walsh

Alternate: Neil Baker

Committee Chairs & Tasks

Health Benefits/JLMBC: Phyris Tobler

Membership: Lou Maricle

Financial Oversight: Phyris Tobler

CRCEA Rep: Carol Bauer

Alternate: Lou Maricle

Newsletter Editor: Phyris Tobler

Programs:

Scholarships: Ed Clites

SCCLO:

ICPC: Bill Robotka

NBLC: Andre Bercut

Facebook Coordinator: Bob Bulwa

[Contact info on website](#)

February 24th Membership Meeting Speaker

As most of you know, SCARE offers its members discounted group insurance through Pacific Group Agencies. AMBA has acquired Pacific Group Agencies but will continue to provide insurance under name of PGA or PGA/AMBA. The reason they are able to provide cheaper insurance to a small group like SCARE is that included in the group are large counties like Los Angeles, San Diego, and Sacramento.

AMBA is a Texas based company. However, we will still be dealing with the same people who have their office in Santa Clarita, CA. The local support network is still Steve Pettee, Viviene Reyes, Katie Valdez and Jacky Casillas. **Bo Carr** will be making a Zoom presentation at our February 24 membership meeting about their services. They offer more than PGA did including access to discounts for restaurants, travel, and wellness centers. Our members will get a Benefits Guide from them at about the same time as they get the Benefits Guide from the County. This will allow you to compare dental plans and decide whether you want the County plan or the one through PGA/AMBA. See more on dental plans on page 3.

Need for a Political Action Committee

Also at the membership meeting will be a presentation on why we are asking the membership to approve a Political Action Committee.

The Board of Directors has been engaged for some time now in discussions concerning our lack of a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) and the decrease in settlement money being provided for health care. The SCARE Board has met with individual supervisors and spoken at board meetings in pursuit of these goals and while there is a general feeling that the county may be interested in looking at some type of COLA, there is no guarantee that it will ever happen without further work from us as retirees.

With that in mind, a significant amount of time has been spent on whether to form a political action committee/political issues committee (PAC/PIC) and use that as a vehicle to effect positive changes to the Board of Supervisors.

The SCARE board has decided that it is in the best interests of retirees that we form a political action committee and fund it so that we may take further actions to achieve a cost-of-living adjustment. We all know that it will take political pressure to gain what we are after. If the Board of Supervisors wanted to do the right thing, it would already have done so.

The committee shall be funded using dues money as that allows us to avoid paying taxes. The focus of the committee shall be the Board of Supervisors and any legislation that may impact us as retirees. The Committee shall **NOT** be involved in federal elections. You will be asked at the February member meeting to vote on the proposed bylaws so that the Board may continue to advocate fully on behalf of us all. Proposed change:

Article VIII, Section 2,

h) The Political Action Committee – whose duties shall include the gathering of information on upcoming elections, recommendations to the Board of Director on endorsements and expenditure of PAC/PIC-related funds. Approval of all PAC/PIC disbursement requests shall be determined by a vote of the Board of Directors. PAC/PIC will be funded by dues.

JLMBC Report by Phyris Tobler

Health Insurance Information

Annual enrollment will be from March 23—April 10. Be sure that Human Resources Benefits Unit has your current address so you receive the Retiree Benefits Guide.

Update on expected changes to health insurance rates that will be effective June 1, 2026

- For those on the County Health Plan who are under 65, there will be no change in the premium. Increase is being covered out of the CHP reserves.
- Kaiser rates for under 65 for the HMO will go from \$1,220 to \$1,281, or 5%. Kaiser's Medicare rates will go from \$356 to \$382 for a 7.3% increase.
- Sutter cost for HMO will go from \$856 to \$1,010 for an 18% increase. They originally gave county an increase of 24% but came down a little. Sutter doesn't have a Medicare plan and they do not currently plan to have one.
- Western Health Advantage is going from \$842 to \$894 for a 6.2% increase. They no longer offer a Medicare plan.
- Unfortunately we do not yet have rate for Anthem. Current rate is \$286 but it is likely to go up 5%. I think it will still be the least expensive Medicare plan.
- AARP/UHC plan is an individual plan so rates vary depending on geographic area and age. Since their rates usually increase the first of the year, if you have one of these plans, you should have a pretty good idea of what your rate will be. Their rates have increased over the last few years so it is likely that it is no longer the least expensive plan. It can also be very expensive if you are taking any brand name drugs.

The County dental insurance (the PPO through Delta Dental) is increasing from \$47.06 to \$48.47. The only thing that is going down, but not by much, is the life insurance. It is currently \$9.85 and it will be \$9.50.

Other information on Anthem Insurance:

Providence sent out letters to people who had Providence doctors saying that they wouldn't be accepting Anthem patients anymore. After talking to HR, that was done in error. Anthem has contract with Providence until 2028.

More recently, Anthem had a cyber attack and people with that coverage have received letters from Conduit letting them know and explaining they have protection through Privacy Solutions. This is legit and Human Resources will be sending letter to all affected retirees explaining what they should do.

Other information:

If you are taking a GLP1 drug like Wegovy, some insurance is no longer covering it depending on what your health situation is. Generally, it is not being covered if it is just for weight loss. It is unclear how Medicare is handling this.

SCARE will again be offering a variety of different types of insurance through Pacific Group Agencies/AMBA. We expect it to be an expanded offering this year. Members should be receiving a booklet from them about the same time as the County Benefits Guide comes out. **Be sure SCARE has your correct mailing address.** You must signup for the dental and vision insurance during open enrollment whereas you can take out any of the others at any time. As the county dental insurance gets more expensive, it is worth comparing the PGA offering with the county dental plan. The PGA one is a little richer and allows payment to non-network dentist, although the coverage is not quite as good. Once you have both booklets, you should compare the coverage before making a decision. PGA insurance uses the Ameritas network instead of Delta.

Vision insurance is still offered through SCERA and you should get a flyer that shows the coverage.

2025-26 Sonoma State Scholarship Winners

SCARE gives two \$3,000 scholarships to SSU students who are children or grandchildren of Sonoma County employees or retirees.

Josie Thurman

Major: Education Specialist Mild/Mod Credential Program (Special education credential)

Thank you so much for the scholarship. Without financial aid and scholarships, I would not be able to afford this teaching credential program, and the financial burden would mean taking out more loans or choosing a different path. I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to finish this program so I can continue working with my students in the school district I was raised in. I want to be part of the Cotati-Rohnert Park Unified School District so I can give back to the community that gave so much to me.

Vinci Aure

Major: Electrical Engineering (BS), First-Year

This scholarship not only helps me but it also helps my family. With this, the burden of being a non-resident student is made easier and allows me to save some money for the future. I'm sure I will try to find an internship in the future as in the summer I would take courses that can add certificates which would improve my resume.

Effort to Get BOS to Reopen SCARE Settlement and Increase Contribution to Health Insurance

One of our Board members got a letter from Chris Coursey related to reopening our settlement agreement. It was a definite no as he states the cost would be \$10 million a year in a county budget that is already showing a budget deficit. He said he was giving us this info so we had the background on why the Board didn't want to reopen settlement, but he also said that he wasn't telling us not to ask. So, if this affects you, keep writing to the Board of Supervisors.

It may be that the BOS thinks that because they approved legislation that would allow more flexibility in giving COLAs, that is enough. Of course, legislation has to be approved which we hope will happen this year but there is no guarantee. And even if approved, there will be no COLA in 2026.

Alphabet Soup by Bill Robotka

Independent Citizens Pension Committee (ICPC): The ICPC met on December 4th, and discussed the 2025 report to the Board of Supervisors (BOS) and plans for review of the 2026 report. The 2025 "State of the Pension" report to the BOS is available at this link: <https://sonoma-county.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=7703052&GUID=260F56A0-4B4E-4684-9406-6ABE44A9E4BC&Options=&Search=>

The news of the County pursuing legislation that would enable targeted (meaning to a specific subset of County retirees, e.g. those retired before 2006) COLA was discussed. The County's 2026 legislative program is available at: <https://sonoma-county.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=7711644&GUID=248144E3-B61B-43BE-8E22-CD1657835624&Options=&Search=>

One of the newer members of the ICPC announced they were stepping off the committee as well. If you know of anyone interested in being appointed to the ICPC (BOS appoints) either contact me, or use the ICPC web site to find out more. Application to be appointed to a County committee can be done online at this address: <https://sonoma-county.granicus.com/boards/forms/589/apply/4778002?code=75ba50d1-da07-41f5-a6eb-e61e9693be6c>

North Bay Central Labor Council (NBCLC): The CLC's annual COPE awards banquet was November 14th this year. SCARE also sponsors this event and I attended. It was a night of networking with political and labor folks, and listening to speeches. I was able to have numerous retiree COLA/Health care discussions, encouraging folks to support our interests.

CLC leadership has supported SCARE in lobbying the BOS on COLA and Health benefit issues, and continues working with SCARE to develop a plan for this and provide guidance on when/how to best support us.

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. And if we don't hear from you, this is what happens: Mail and newsletters were returned with no forwarding address for the following members - **Katherine Brackett, Mitchell Holcomb, Mary McDonald, Sung Nguyen, David Sederholm and William Walters.** Board member, **Alix Shor**, attempts to contact these people by phone and/or email but has not been able to reach them so we have no way of contacting them. If anyone knows how to reach them, would you please contact them and ask them to contact Alix Shor at aliashor@sonic.net or 707 495-4992 or give her the number and she'll call them.

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 benefits@sonomacounty.gov / 707-565-2900

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



In Memoriam

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

Patricia Adams
Ines Deghi
Patricia Duclos
Wendy Green
William Hoffard
Karen Peterson
Kathryn Sillon
Nancy Walker

Carole Baker
Helen Dovell
Howard Finger
William Hayes
Jerald Knowlton
James Shrum
Janet Thomas



Preventing Falls

25% of older adults fall at least once a year. In 2023, more than 41,000 people over age 65 died from one. Clearly this is a serious problem. Maintaining your strength and balance are key.

Suggestions to prevent falls from Consumer Reports "On Health" are: (1) walking. 150 minutes/week can cut risk of falling by 30%. (2) tai chi increases strength and balance (3) wear good shoes like sneakers, even in the house (4) check meds as some contribute to dizziness. See if there is an alternative. (5) check your lower body strength by doing sitting to standing exercise. Many places suggest weight training in addition to physical exercise. If you are shaky, there are a lot of online suggestions for building strength and balance.

You may be able to pay less for prescription drugs by skipping insurance and paying cash. Using discounts available from websites like [America's Pharmacy](#), [Blink Health](#), [GoodRX](#), [Optum Perks](#), [SingleCare](#), [RXSaver](#) (by RetailMeNot), and [WellRX](#) may make your costs lower than your insurance copays. But be sure to compare costs.

SCARE Membership and Financial Information

SCARE currently has 1885 members. We do not include our financial information in the newsletter, but if you are interested, contact me and I can provide you with a copy of our financial statement (contact information on page 2).

Phyris Tobler

New SCARE Members

In November, we sent letter to all the Sonoma County retirees who were not SCARE Members. We need to increase our membership to be able to put more pressure on the BOS. We had a good response and we welcome these new members:

Brenda Abrahams	
George Aceves	Probation
Jose Alcala	Sheriff's Office
Jan Armentia	Sheriff's Office
Sherry Armstrong	Assessor
Julia Baldwin	Mental Health
Darrell Basore	Probation
Brenda Bautista	Human Services
Vail Bello	Sheriff's Office
Maria Benavides	Public Health
Pamela Berlanga	Human Services
Lorna Blanc	Info. Systems
Vivien Blake	Human Services
JoAnn Borri	Health Services
Rudy Bonilla	Probation
Sheryl Bratton	CAO
Bruce Brown	Water Agency
Jerome Brown	Water Agency
Valerie Brown	BOS
Randy Brummett	Human Services
Nova Burton	Assessor
William Christoffersen	Water Agency
Paul Claassen	Sheriff's Office
Karen Clemmer	Public Health
Michele Clites	Human Services
Linda Collister	PRMD
Christine Condon	Co. Administrator
Sean Connolly	Public Works
Laura Contreras Saldana	Human Services
Ruth Cooper	Sheriff's Office
Joyce Cote	Human Services
Brian Costa	Detention Admin.
Ernestine Craver	Sheriff's Office
Richard Crumley	Regional Parks
Veronica Cruz	Superior Court
Rhonda Darrow	Behavioral Health
Dennis Davis	Water Agency
Karen Davis	Auditor/Tax Coll.
Ronald Derrick	Roads
Jon DeVault	Sheriff's Office
Kimberly Dietrich	Health Services
Doris Dixon	Mental Health
Nina Donofrio	Transportation
John Dunn	Human Services
Cecile Focha	District Attorney

Continued:

Alan Fasio	Probation
Roy Franchini	District Attorney
Julia Freis	BOS
Patricia Gilardi	Clerk-Recorder
Deborah Gilliam	Retirement
Diane Ginn	Mental Health
Ralph Glorioso	Superior Court
Karyn Greene	Human Services
Rene Green	Sheriff's Office
Dennis Hartsfield	General Services
David Head	Sheriff's Office
Sharon Henderson	Human Services
Kathleen Hennessey	Sheriff's Office
Lloyd Hernandez	Info. Systems
Joyce Hightower	Health Services
Christina Holston	Fleet Operations
Juan Huerta Perez	
David Hurley	District Attorney
Sandra Hyde	Environmental Hlth
Marty Isom	Water Agency
Pamela Jeane	Clerk/Recorder
Jondaleen Jones	Facilities Operation
Clarence Keel	Behavioral Health
Phyllis King	Clerk-Recorder-Ass
Stephen Lehmann	
Frank Lee	Sheriff's Office
Desire Lomas	Sheriff's Office
Kathryn Lowe	PRMD
Frederich Lustenberger	
Jan MacInnis	Communications
Rick Maudlin	Behavioral Health
Cathy McFann	District Attorney
Marilyn McCarthy	Info. Systems
Robert Moore	Water Agency
Patricia Morrison	Public Health
Kathlee Moser	Courts
Maria Nieto	Water Agency
Charles Novak	District Attorney
Knoel Owen	Sheriff's Office
Thomas Peirsol	Human Services
Alfredo Perez	
Pamela Perry	Housing Authority
Rita Pesetti	Hospital Pharmacy
Patricia Peters	Clerk-Recorder
Vicki Petersen	Human Services
Felisa Pinson	Probation
Jeanne Piper	Human Services
Romus Reece	Human Services
Carol Rex	Human Resources
Sonja Rhoades	Sheriff's Office
Mario Robledo	

Congratulations New Retirees and New SCARE Members (in bold)



James Alexander	Health Services
Wendy Bauer	Health Services
Jean Coyston	Superior Court
Nader Dahu	Public Infrastructure
Weldon Deatherage	Probation
Gary Del Carlo	Water Agency
William Diefenderfer	Sonoma Public Infrastructure
Mitchell Ferrick	Information Systems
Michael Gelber	Regional Parks
Paul Gullixson	County Administrator
Mark Hays	Child Support Services
Michael Hromalik	Health Services
Brian Kandel	District Attorney
Heidi Lavell	Information Systems
Darrell Light	Clerk Recorder Assessor
Yudith Arreguin Lopez	Human Services
John Lowe	Sheriff's Office
Daniel Lozano	Health Services
Kathleen McCoy	Ag Commissioner/Sealer
Maria Mullin	Human Services
Melanie Parker	Regional Parks
Timothy Pritchard	Regional Parks
Allen Prolo	Water Agency
Lynne Rosselli	Water Agency
William Singleton	Child Support Services
Jill Sollom	Human Services
Steven Stoural	Information Systems
Ana Topete	Superior Court
Rachel Vail	Water Agency
Manuel Vazquez	Human Services
Kathryn Webb	Human Services

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Janice Rodgers	EDB
Valerie Rose	Sheriff's Office
James Saad	Child Support
Raymond Sandretto	SPI
Lori Schandel	Family Support
Colleen Schultz	Health Services
William Simon	Superior Court
Kathleen Smith	Sheriff's Office
Chris Spallino	Health Services
Laura Stafford	
Elinor Steele	Auditor/Tax Coll.
David Sundstrom	Water Agency
Donald Swanz	Water Agency
Martin Swift	Behavioral Health
Cheryl Tamblyn	Public Works
Gary Thomason	
Margaret Turano	
Gerald Turney	Sheriff's Office
Cindy Vargas	Human Services
Karen Wade	Sheriff's Office
Brandley Wallace	
Robert Waner	District Attorney
Frances Ward	Human Services
Mark Wein	Transportation
Kenneth Wells	Public Works
Richard Wishnak	Superior Court
Kenneth Williamson	Sheriff
Scott Wilson	Info Systems
Barbara Wiseman	Sheriff's Office
David Worthington	General Svcs
Katherine Yoder	Sheriff's Office
Kathleen Ziegler	

Encourage Fellow Retirees to join SCARE!

We only have about a third of retirees as members. When we are approaching the Board or Supervisors to ask for a COLA, we are in a much stronger position with more members. If you know any retirees who are not members, please encourage them to join. They can get a copy of our application form on our website at <https://www.sonomacountyretirees.com/application.pdf>

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

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

Address Service Requested

General Membership Meeting February 24, 2025

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=83007426292>, Meeting ID: 895 463 2781, Dial by your location: +1 669 444 9171 US..

MEMBERSHIP MEETING AGENDA

- **PRESENTER FROM AMBA DISCUSSING NEW INSURANCE OPTIONS**
- **PRESENTATION ON SETTING UP PAC AND VOTE ON CHANGE IN BYLAWS**
- **JLMBC REPORT**
- **SCCLO/NBLC/JCPC REPORT**
- **DRAWING FOR GIFT CARDS (3 for those at Finley and 3 for those on Zoom) Must be present**