

## **KRTA History 1956-1995**

***The following history of KRTA during the period 1956-1995 was prepared in 1996 by M. L. Archer, Membership and Pre-Retirement Committee Chair (with the assistance of Dr. Marvin Dodson, Ted Crosthwait, the KRTA staff and others).***

### **1956-1995**

The Kentucky Teachers' Retirement System Law was passed in 1938 and funded in 1940. The Law specified that the active teachers would contribute to the fund and the State would match their contributions. The Law also stipulated that an additional appropriation would be made by the State to fund contributions not made by those who taught before 1940. This was a sizable fund and the Law stipulated that it be paid over a 30-year period. Several years went by and several administrations failed to make the necessary appropriations. This plus several other concerns prompted a few interested individuals to decide that retired teachers in Kentucky needed a voice to represent them. They spread the word around that we were being neglected. Some concerns were:

1. The "over match" was being neglected.
2. Nothing was being appropriated for cost-of-living increases. (See Appendix I.)
3. Health problems were becoming more apparent without adequate insurance to cover medical costs.
4. It became apparent that other problems could occur and that we needed representation.

A group of prominent educators met at the KEA building in Louisville, Kentucky, and discussed the possibility of creating an organization to be called the "Kentucky Retired Teachers Association." It would have as its sole purpose the welfare of retired teachers. Dr. Marvin Dodson was the Executive Secretary of KEA and gave it his and KEA's blessing as they did not have the staff or resources to fund such an organization.

From this meeting KRTA was organized in 1957 and KEA agreed to furnish office space and secretarial help. A KEA staff member served as a consultant to the President and Executive Council. Dues were established at \$5 per member and KEA was paid \$2 per member to provide the services previously listed and to include an insert in the KEA paper. This service continued after KEA moved to Frankfort in the early 80's and ended on July 1, 1991.

Dr. Dodson retired from KEA and was hired by KRTA part time in 1978. To pay Dr. Dodson, the dues were increased to \$10 per year. We still paid KEA \$2 per member for computer services, printing, and the insert in their newspaper. KEA had no direct participation in the operation of KRTA. Dr. Dodson, a secretary, and many volunteers did the work. I distinctly remember Margaret and Les Wetherell being present almost every time I visited the State office. Dr. Dodson said the biggest job facing the early leaders of KRTA was getting locals established in the various counties.

In the beginning there were 12 districts established and it seems the First District was the leader in getting membership. I can understand why after meeting Dolly Gillihan from Ledbetter, Kentucky, in Livingston County. She visited every county in the district and knew several retired teachers in each

county. The First District has been number one in membership since the beginning and is still number one today. Getting the other districts and counties organized was more difficult since there was a great deal of apathy in some counties toward organizing locals.

The Legislative Committee was formed to represent KRTA in the Legislature. This was headed by Mr. W. S. Milburn from the Louisville schools. He was hampered by the lack of local organized support, but it was a start.

However, because of the efforts of a few dedicated leaders, a strong beginning was underway. By 1964 the Medical Insurance Program was developed and made effective in 1965. In 1966 the practice of giving retirees periodic cost-of-living increases was begun. The influence of strong local leadership has been so successful that this practice has continued in all but a very few years. In fact, during the period from 1966 to 1994 there were only seven years when an ad hoc COLA was not provided. Local units in each county have made it possible for individual retirees to be heard regarding matters of importance to them.

The first President was John Brown who served two terms from 1957 to 1959. He was followed by Mary McGuire 1959-1961 and R. E. Jagers 1961-1963. Bess Roberts, who served in 1962-1963 remained active after her term and remains so today. Ms. Willie Ray, Superintendent, Shelbyville City Schools, was active for many years. She served as President in 1965-1967. Mr. Gordie Young who was President in 1963-1965 served as Assistant Superintendent of Public Instruction under two or more State Superintendents.

I only mention these early Presidents to impress upon you the kind of people who were responsible for our having such a fine organization. When I retired in 1975 and joined KRTA, I immediately heard of Mr. James Ennis and his wife Ruth from Metcalfe County, who represented the Third District so well along with Bob Piper and his wife Elinor. Bob served effectively as President in 1981-1983. The districts began gaining life as leaders emerged in each district.

The organization really blossomed when KEA moved to Frankfort and KRTA moved into the Sullivan College Building, 3901 Atkinson Drive, just off Newburg Road and the Watterson Expressway. After a few years in this building, the Council started talking about a building of its own. Excess funds were set aside in a building fund account. Dr. Dodson recalls that KRTA began holding three workshops each year in the fall at the state parks. The agenda would go something like this: An afternoon session on the first day; dinner and a night session followed by some socializing; an overnight stay; breakfast and a morning session. After lunch the participants would head home. KRTA would pay for one car from each local. NRTA paid for lunch for five people from each local unit. The Council decided later that more participants could be reached if one day workshops were held in each district. There was some displeasure about missing the social aspects of the meeting, but the change was made and remains this way until the present time.

In 1965 the Retirement System started a Health and Insurance Program by assessing the active teachers about 3/4 of 1 percent of their salaries matched by the State. This necessitated KRTA having an Insurance Committee. Mr. Jack Gardner served as the first chairman. He had a representative from each district on his committee. Robert Kelley was active on his committee and became chairman when Jack became disabled in 1987. Robert is still chairman and the committee remains very active under his leadership.

The many fine leaders we have had over the years have all left their imprint on the organization. Joe Howard gave Louisville a boost in 1976-1977; Clyde Lassiter gave Central Kentucky a boost; and John Ridgway was never president but helped me considerably when I was President in 1983-1984. I remember Harry Sparks' inspirational leadership in 1979-1980, as well as Dillard Moor from the Fourth District in 1978-1979. Grace Crosthwaite was certainly a great leader in Eastern Kentucky. I remember her well. Virginia Murrell was President in 1982-1983 and gave a boost statewide, especially in Northern Kentucky where she taught most of her career and in Middle Cumberland District where she lived.

In 1983-1984 while President, I was charged by Dolly Gillihan to finish organizing the few locals that were still unorganized. We were successful in organizing Wolfe, Menifee, and Trimble Counties. More recently Leslie County has been organized, and we now have representation in every county.

Several changes in organizational structure have taken place at the Council's direction since KRTA was first organized. The Eastern District was divided into two districts—Eastern and Big Sandy. Central District was also split forming Central Kentucky East and Central Kentucky West. At the same time Franklin County was moved out of the Central District into Fifth District in an effort to give Fifth District sufficient size to be more active. The move proved to be effective, and the Fifth District now ranks fourth in the State in membership percentage. In all cases where districts were split or changed, a resulting growth in membership has occurred.

Increased membership became our main objective during my term as President. I was privileged to attend a meeting on pre-retirement planning for active teachers in South Carolina. I reported back to the Council, and they approved a program for KRTA to start this service in Kentucky. With the help of Frank Hatfield, who had then replaced Dr. Marvin Dodson as Executive Director of KRTA, and Charles DeWeese, seminars were offered in each district in the State. Seminars were conducted on Saturday mornings during the months of September and October. The attendance was great and the involvement of the retired teachers with active teachers prompted the active teachers to become interested in KRTA when they retired.

Holding these seminars plus an agreement in 1980 for the Retirement System to withhold dues from the retirees' annuity checks in November each year has been instrumental in the growth of the Association. Many teachers sign the automatic dues deduction forms at the Pre-Retirement Seminars before they retire. These forms are kept on file and sent to Frankfort when KRTA is notified of their retirement. The Pre-Retirement Program has gone well and continued under KRTA's direction until 1993 when the Retirement System assumed responsibility for conducting the Pre-Retirement Seminars. The change was made with the encouragement of KRTA since it was felt that KTRS was in the position to provide more information and might get more attendance because of their official position with the retirees. In order to remain in touch with active teachers, KRTA agreed to attend the seminars to help with registration and provide refreshments.

J. D. Turley served as President of KRTA in 1984-1985. He developed the KRTA logo and got the Association started on visual presentations to encourage membership. He also divided Jefferson County into small segments and was successful in greatly increasing the KRTA membership from Jefferson County.

I was appointed State Membership Chairman in 1984 and remain in that position today. My main purpose in preparing this history is to demonstrate how important membership is to having a strong organization and how important a strong organization is to the welfare of retired teachers in Kentucky.

Jack Gardner served effectively as President in 1985-1986 and then served as Chairman of the Health and Insurance Committee until 1987.

NRTA served Kentucky well under Dolly Gillihan's leadership. When Kentucky and all other NRTA members merged with AARP in 1982, Ted Crosthwait was appointed Coordinator for Kentucky. He served in that position until 1986 when Charles DeWeese was appointed Coordinator. Both gentlemen did an outstanding job for retired teachers in Kentucky. After Charles DeWeese's death in 1991, Ms. Pearl Miller was appointed Coordinator, a position she continues to effectively fill. KRTA is fortunate to have the support of AARP, especially the help in financing our Fall Workshops by providing funds for meals for five persons from each local association, the district officers, and other guests. KRTA also works with AARP on legislative issues of common interest.

Ted Crosthwait was reappointed Legislative Chairman (a position he had previously held) after leaving the coordinator's job. The Council has regretfully accepted Mr. Crosthwait's resignation from the Chairmanship of the Legislative Committee effective June 30, 1994. He has assured the Council that he will continue to work with that committee and cooperate fully with his replacement. Ted's expertise will be missed; he is well known across the state by most state legislators. Having served as Executive Secretary of KTRS, he is most knowledgeable about Retirement System Law and the needs of the Retirement System as well as the membership.

We continue to have able presidents and leadership from the State office. Dr. Dodson retired from his position as part-time Executive Director on June 30, 1987. Mr. Frank Hatfield, former Superintendent of Bullitt County Schools, was employed full time to replace Dr. Dodson. The Constitution was revised, and the dues were raised to \$15 per year prior to Dr. Dodson's leaving the Association. This created sufficient funds to pay a full-time director.

Following the employment of full-time staff, membership increased rapidly. This increase created a surplus in funds that was set aside to acquire an office building. This long-time dream of the early leadership in KRTA was accomplished with the purchase of property in April 1991. The Hillenbrand Office building was dedicated on June 6, 1993. It is located at 7505 Bardstown Road in Louisville, Kentucky.

The list of outstanding Presidents has continued since the change to a full time Executive Director. They include; Ted Crosthwait, 1987-1988, Fifth District; Mildred Tupman, 1988-1989, Northern Kentucky District; John Vickers, 1989-1990, Central East District; Russell Boyd, 1990-1991, Big Sandy District; Robert Kelley, 1991-1992, Fifth District; Juanita Singleton, 1992-1993, Upper Kentucky River District; and Bobby Humes, 1993-1994, Fourth District. These Presidents have all made their contribution toward moving the State organization to better serve the membership. (See Appendix II for a complete list of presidents and their years of service.)

Evidence of this progress includes:

1. We've seen a continuous growth in membership to an all-time high of 14,758 in February 1994. (See Appendix III.)

2. We have our own newspaper which has increased in size from four to eight or twelve pages depending on the need.
3. We no longer depend on KEA for any services and pay them no dues.
4. We now have our own in-house computer services.
5. Our office building is completely furnished, fully paid for, and the Association still has funds in the bank above the needs for current operating cost.
6. The Legaline has been made available to the membership for basic legal information through a toll-free telephone line.
7. Free financial advice is also available on a toll-free telephone line.
8. KRTA is represented at each Legislative Session by a qualified lobbying body.
9. We have maintained excellent relations with the Retirement System and work closely with the staff to coordinate the KTRS Legislative Program with the KRTA Program.
10. The State organization has made available to the membership an excellent Long Term Care Insurance Program. This Program is provided to the members at a discounted premium rate. A Dental/Vision Plan was also offered to the membership beginning in January 1994.

There will be other services provided as we grow and improve our organization. We have a strong State Association; our districts are also beginning to take on more responsibility. Membership is increasing and we believe the emphasis for further improvement of our Association lies with our local units. Our goal in 1994-1995 is to strengthen the organization at the local level. We are suggesting that the District Council Members and the District Officers work together holding a meeting in the district soon after each Council meeting.

These meetings should concentrate on Membership in June or July, Health and Insurance in August or September, and Legislation in December. The spring meeting could be used to emphasize plans for the upcoming year.

We need to continue what a few farsighted individuals saw as a need in the State to serve retired teachers. We would be remiss if we didn't mention the fact that volunteers are the backbone of our organization, and we need to be on the lookout for capable people to take leadership roles. This is the key to keeping our organization strong. Our central staff is not sufficient to do all the work required to have an effective organization. The more interest and commitment we have on the part of each member the more we can be assured that KRTA will keep moving in the right direction.

I hope you see how this brief history should inspire greater participation in our organization, because the efforts of volunteers in the future just like those in the past will continue to benefit the volunteers' well-being as well as many others. With the increased number of retirees, we are having each year, the task becomes more difficult and requires more effort on the part of each of us. This postscript expresses my sentiments as your Membership Chairman, and I hope you will see the importance of membership to the organization.