

MEA-Retired

The Commitment Continues

Michigan Retirement Report

March 2019
Vol. XXXV, No. 3

Mr. Sparapani is there

Though MEA-Retired member Jim Sparapani has traveled the country serving his union as a member of the MEA Diversity Training Cadre and as a delegate to both the NEA Representative Assembly and NEA-Retired Annual Meeting, this upper peninsula native has always lived in Dickinson County, bordering Wisconsin.



UP native Jim Sparapani continues serving others in his family and community, as well as MEA-Retired.

“I have never lived more than ten miles from my parents’ home,” he said.

When Jim was growing up, his parents stressed the importance of learning, and not just in the school setting. As the second of six children raised on a farm, Jim’s variety of experiences provided him with interesting job opportunities.

“I learned to operate and repair all types of equipment,” he said. “We went from farming to logging, and also had our own sawmill, where some of the wood we cut was made into lumber that built many homes and camps in the area. Our biggest income was pulp wood for the paper mills in the area.”

After being laid off from a job with a steel fabrication company making structural steel for the building trades, Jim temporarily worked for his father in the forest industry when he heard about a job in the Breitung Township Schools. Very

soon after he was hired, Jim became a member of the school family, understanding the importance of all employees in students’ lives.

“My wife’s uncle heard of a position open at the school in custodial/maintenance and busing. He was a friend of the supervisor, and I was hired. I knew right away that as a member of the support staff, we make the school a safe and friendly place to be. A bus driver’s smile in the morning can set the tone for the day. The food service worker’s special touch gives the student just the thing that nourishes him. The secretary’s smile and para-pro’s hug help him through the day, and the custodial/maintenance staff keeps the buildings safe, clean and warm so all staff and students can enjoy the school experience,” he said.

Jim began his union involvement locally as the president of Local #1, which represented bus drivers, custodians and mechanics. This

became a wall-to-wall unit joining MEA in the mid-1980's. Serving as president, secretary, chief negotiator and grievance chair of his local association prepared him to work with even more members outside his area and state. Jim jumped in, head first.

"My first involvement in MEA was filling a vacant MEA-RA position from Region 17. I was co-chair of the Region 17 Coordinating Council, was asked to fill an interim seat on the state ESP Caucus Board. Soon afterward, I ran for that and the MEA Board and won both seats. I have also served on the Long Range Bargaining Committee, IPD Committee, MEA/PAC Council and many other committees," he said.

Since retiring in 2010, Jim has continued his active involvement with MEA/NEA Retired. After being elected to the MEA Retired Board of Directors as ESP At-Large he served on the committee to create a mission statement for the

organization, and connected with four other members to create a new chapter in Region 17: UP Tri-County MEA-Retired. He continues to serve as a delegate to the MEA and NEA Representative Assemblies and the NEA Annual Meeting.

During his free time, Jim enjoys wonderful time with family and friends, and relishes outdoor activities like hunting, fishing, cutting firewood and riding on his ORV. Active as an elder in his church, he is chairman of the board and a Sunday school teacher, and even preaches occasionally when the minister is not available. Other time is spent giving back to the community he loves.

"I am the president of the Merriman Farmers Union, a group that supports the family farm and a 4-H youth group. We support the community Fourth of July fireworks, the military memorial the Caring House Shelter for battered women

and children, the community Easter egg hunt, sponsor a needy family at Christmas and provide scholarships to local graduates."

Continuing his dedication to serving others in his community and beyond, Jim recalled a story of helping a student many years ago.

"I was shoveling snow one morning on a snow day. When I came into the school building, and I was the only one there, a kindergarten student was sitting in a chair by the office; his mom had dropped him off on her way to work. I was able to contact someone to pick him up, and when I saw his mom a few days later, she was very thankful. She said that she asked her son if he was afraid being in the big school all by himself. Her son told her, 'I was not alone, Mr. Sparapani was there.'"

Jim Sparapani is STILL there for his family, his community, and his fellow MEA-Retired members. ♦

President's message

Judy Foster

Are you happy or unhappy with the political climate we are now experiencing? When we were working, it was important for us to thank parents and let them know when we had concerns. We tried to encourage students to do the same. Life has not changed that much since we are retired as there are still opportunities when our legislators should be thanked for what they do. Don't miss that opportunity, and conversely, there might be times when we have should express our concerns. Be sure to let your feelings be known. Using the excuse, "My legislator

won't listen to me," is no longer a viable excuse. We didn't give up on our students and we did everything we could to make sure they succeeded. Our legislators need to learn from us—so don't miss an opportunity to let them hear from you. We can make a difference. That has been proven time and time again!

Legislators in Washington, DC

www.house.gov for members of the House of Representatives.

www.senate.gov for members of the U.S. Senate

White House: 202-456-1111



Legislators in Lansing, MI

www.legislature.mi.gov/mileg.aspx?page=legislators

Governor Whitmer's Office:
517-373-3400 ♦

New MEA member discount through Staples

The average educator spends more than \$500 per year out of pocket for supplies for their students and classroom or worksite. Taking advantage of MEA's bargaining power and collective strength, our new members-only partnership with Staples could save you an average of 30% on supply

purchases. At that \$500 average, that could mean an extra \$150 back in your pocket, or millions of dollars saved when you multiply that across all of MEA's members.

This new benefit of membership can save you money on purchases you need at work or at home. You can even save money on last

minute holiday gifts! Learn more by logging into MEA's "Members Only."

(NOTE: Once you sign up for program, if you want to get the discount in-person at your local Staples, you need to register the credit card you'll want to use there.) ♦

MEA-Retired dues increase September, 2019

Help spread the word!! In September 2019 dues will increase by \$50 making dues \$500. All of you know and realize that MEA-Retired members continue to enjoy

benefits from MESSA, MEA Financial Services, as well as benefits from NEA. If you know retirees that are not members please share this information with

them. To learn how much money retirees may have already paid into MEA-Retired dues, call Lisa Andros at 517-333-6264. ♦

Insurance rates, deductions on miAccount

ORS mailed you personalized rates in early October which detailed your monthly insurance premium costs for insurance in 2019. The change was reflecting starting with your January pension payment. You can log in to miAccount and see the costs reflected on your pension history statement.

Have questions about your insurance plan? Carriers typically

send the annual notice of change and other materials for the upcoming year in November or December. OptumRx, Priority Health and Blue Cross Blue Shield (BCBSM) made them available on their websites in mid-December as well, in case you need to refer back or did not receive them in the mail. These materials should help you better understand your plan.

For BCBSM, please visit **www.bcbsm.com/mpsers** and click on either the Medicare Members or Non-Medicare Members tab at the top of the page depending whether you are on Medicare or not. For OptumRx, please visit **www.optumrx.com**. For Priority Health please visit **www.priorityhealth.com/mpsers**. ♦

Tax forms mailed, available online

1099-R forms were made available in miAccount on January 1, 2019. Printed versions were mailed at the end of January.

If you have or had retiree insurance coverage at any time during 2018 under the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan retiree insurance plan, you will receive a 1095-B statement reflecting any non-Medicare

enrollees covered by you. These statements should have arrived by the end of January or first week of February. Medicare is responsible for providing statements reflecting Medicare coverage for anyone on your plan. HMOs are responsible for providing statements reflective of any coverage you had during 2018 under an HMO.

The federal and state tax tables are subject to change annually. Tax rates for 2019 took effect with your January pension payment. Because of this, you may notice a change in your taxes withheld even though you have not made any changes. If you wish to view or modify your tax withholdings, you can do so in miAccount. ♦

Pension payments and statements

Just a reminder, monthly pension statements are always available in miAccount at **www.michigan.gov/orsmiaccount**. ORS mails pension statements periodically throughout

the year but does not mail them on a monthly basis. If you are interested in opting out of paper Direct Deposit statements, that option will be coming in 2019. We

will send an email with more information about how to opt out once that feature is available. ♦

Don't become victim of a scam during tax season

The Internal Revenue Service reminds taxpayers to be careful with continuing aggressive phone scams as criminals pose as IRS agents in hopes of stealing money.

During filing season, the IRS generally sees a surge in scam phone calls threatening such things as arrest, deportation and license revocation if the victim doesn't pay a bogus tax bill. In a new twist being seen in recent weeks, identity thieves file fraudulent tax returns with refunds going into the real taxpayer's bank account—followed by a phone call trying to con the taxpayer to send the money to the scammer.

The Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA) reports they have become aware of over 12,716 victims who have collectively paid over \$63 million as a result of phone scams since October 2013.

Here are some things the scammers often do, but the IRS will not do. Taxpayers should remember that

any one of these is a tell-tale sign of a scam.

The IRS Will Never:

Call to demand immediate payment using a specific payment method such as a prepaid debit card, gift card or wire transfer. Generally, the IRS will first mail a bill to any taxpayer who owes taxes.

- Threaten to immediately bring in local police or other law-enforcement groups to have the taxpayer arrested for not paying.
- Demand that taxes be paid without giving taxpayers the opportunity to question or appeal the amount owed.
- Ask for credit or debit card numbers over the phone.
- Call you about an unexpected refund.

For Taxpayers Who Don't Owe Taxes or Don't Think They Do:

- Do not give out any information. Hang up immediately.

- Contact TIGTA to report the call. Use their IRS Impersonation Scam Reporting web page. Alternatively, call 800-366-4484.
- Report it to the Federal Trade Commission. Use the "FTC Complaint Assistant" on **FTC.gov**. Please add "IRS Telephone Scam" in the notes.

For Those Who Owe Taxes or Think They Do:

- Call the IRS at 800-829-1040. IRS workers can help.

Stay alert to scams that use the IRS as a lure. Tax scams can happen any time of year, not just at tax time. For more information visit Tax Scams and Consumer Alerts on **IRS.gov**.

Taxpayers have a set of fundamental rights they should be aware of when dealing with the IRS. These are the Taxpayer Bill of Rights. Explore these rights and the agency's obligations to protect them on **IRS.gov**. ♦

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The *Michigan Retirement Report* is the official voice of the Michigan Education Association-Retired. It is published five times a year in East Lansing and is sent to all pre-retired and retired members of MEA-Retired.