

# The Association of the University of Akron Retirees (AUAR)

## What is the AUAR about?

We are an association of about 300 former University of Akron employees, faculty and administrators, and their spouses and families. Our mission is to provide reasonably-priced social and educational activities for our membership as well as volunteer opportunities; to ease the transition from work to retirement; and to monitor and lobby government at the State and Federal levels to safeguard the Ohio pension systems [STRS, PERS and SERS] and preserve our health benefits. Our Executive Board cooperates with OCHER and ORTA. The AUAR Newsletter, which provides detailed information about our programs, is published every six months and sent to members via e-mail or regular US. Mail and is deposited in the University of Akron Archives. The AUAR also sponsors an endowed scholarship open to undergraduate students in all majors, which is administered by the AUAR Board and Office of Development

## A Brief History of the Association of the University of Akron

The founding of the AUAR officially occurred on 10 December 1998 at the Martin Center on the University of Akron Main Campus when its written constitution and by-laws were adopted. However, that meeting was the culmination of a two-year process bringing together two separate efforts.

Since 1996, Dr. Harvey Sterns (Psychology and the Institute for Life Span Development and Gerontology) and Dr. Michael Sugarman (College of Education), with support from Timothy Dufore (Development Office) had been trying to create an Emeriti College. Meanwhile, Dr. Robert Ferguson (College of Education) et al had advocated the establishment of a local chapter of OCHER (Ohio College and Higher Education Retirees Association).

University President Marion Reubel directed Dr. Joseph Walton to meet with some retirees to determine whether the two ideas should be pursued separately or incorporated into a single retiree organization. On 25 March 1998 Walton convened an initial meeting that decided to form a Steering Committee, which elected former University of Akron President, Dr. Dominic Guzzetta as Chairman. Before the end of Spring Semester, even before the Steering Committee acted, the Faculty Senate approved the creation of an Emeriti College within the Institute for Life Span Development and Gerontology [the latter had been established on 26 February 1976]. The University of Akron Trustees followed suit on 17 June 1998, granting permission to create the Emeriti College as an association of retired full and part-time faculty, staff, spouses and family members.

On 28 October 1998, 34 people attended a rather chaotic organizational meeting in the Gardner Student Center where Sterns, who presided, decided to appoint Dr. June Burton (History) to chair a large committee of volunteers to draft a constitution and bylaws that would incorporate all the ideas presented that day. Burton then decided that having a sub-committee of three would greatly facilitate this process. She selected Constantin Dimitriou (Classics, an international lawyer and former Rumanian diplomat) and Dr. Carl Lieberman (Political Science) to help her prepare the first draft. Others on the Constitutional Committee were Pam Ruppert (Developmental Programs), Guzzetta, Robert Blankenship (Audio Visual Services), Dr. William Beyer (Mathematics), Mike Sugarman, Ronald Heineking (Chief, University Police), Ferguson [later AUAR's first President], and Alberta Hensley [formerly a social assistant to Pres. Guzzetta, later to be the first newsletter editor]. By 10 November the sub-committee produced a constitution with four purposes:

1. To provide social/recreational activities
2. To provide volunteering opportunities
3. To serve as a voice for the concerns of our constituency to the University at large
4. To voice concerns to public officials.

The Constitution also stated AUAR's affiliation with both OCHER and the Institute for Life Span Development and Gerontology, which was supposed to be its funding agency.

The full committee met on the 12th and 19th of November 1998 to polish the draft that the retirees approved on December 10th. On that day, Burton chaired the meeting that made one important change in the Constitution that was absolutely crucial to our later success as an organization: all previous references to separate categories of personnel (i.e. the traditional hierarchy of faculty, staff, contract professionals and administration belonging to STRS, PERS and SERS) were stricken. After further minor refinements, the document was adopted unanimously by all those present. Then an initial slate of officers was created for a mail ballot that was sent to all U. of A. 800 retirees.

During the next decade and a half, the founders were usually joined by 275-300 dues-paying members. Such a critical mass made it feasible to develop a varied program. Members of the Board performed yeoman service, not just attending to dues and membership rolls, et cetera, but also attending state-wide meetings of OCHER and retired teachers groups that monitor and lobby the Ohio Legislature, U.S. Congress and the three pension systems. The Board of Trustees approved the creation of two seats for retirees in the Faculty Senate where our elected representatives occasionally added mirth as well as greater perspective to the deliberations. All the individual reports of AUAR Senators are filed in the University of Akron Archives with the Minutes of the Executive Board's monthly meetings. After additional funding to finance the AUAR functions as part of the Institute of Life Span Development ceased and the Emeriti College idea failed to materialize as envisioned, the AUAR moved to its current campus home in Human Resources and Development, where it was well-received and supported thereafter.

While the AUAR Executive Board took care of business, with the passing years, its primary focus shifted to a social agenda. Monthly luncheons were scheduled for the second Wednesday at the Martin Center (starting in 1999, a box lunch or buffet for \$6.25 gradually increased to \$10.00 in late 2012). These luncheons drew 40-55 members and guests. One exceptional 2007 speaker was then Beacon Journal cartoonist Chip Bok who drew folio-size caricatures of former U.S. Presidents. Each annual roster included a humorous power point travelogue by a group of retirees who ventured on junkets to fascinating destinations around the globe. These trips were hosted by the Drs. Vukovich, Tom and Diane. The variety of topics ranged from what one would expect from University administrators and coaches (Go Zips!)--to the biomedical engineering of replacement human finger-tips grown on polymer structures placed inside of mice--to music by the U. of A. Steel Drum Band--to the restoration of the Saturn Rocket at Cape Canaveral, Florida, by an Akron firm. Some speakers were selected because they had recently published books, notably those by U. of A. Press. Regardless of the topic, these superb luncheon speakers always kept the audience mesmerized.

Seasonal events were held too. Each fall, a Chili/Soup Supper was held at the lodge at Goodyear Heights Metro Park. Every basketball season the retirees attended a game after sharing a buffet supper in the Tommy Evans Lounge in Rhodes Arena. The Lobster & Suds, which originally was held at the Heisman Lodge by the Rubber Bowl, ended up moving to a

larger venue at St. Sebastian Church's Zwisler Hall on the West Side of Akron, where the men could boil the lobsters outdoors in lobster pots AUAR purchased years ago and brings out of storage every May for this special occasion. This event always drew a crowd of about 70-95 who brought along a covered dish or dessert to accompany the meal. In the middle of the year, a holiday luncheon included a more-or-less humorous \$10.00 gift exchange. In recent years, an Agatha Cristy murder mystery at the quaint Coach House Theater, preceded by a Sunday buffet dinner at the nearby Akron Woman s City Club, became a staple of our entertaining offerings.

Social Committee Chairpersons Tom and Diane Vukovich, whose names seem to keep being mentioned, also planned annual mystery charter bus trips to unlikely locations, including Cleveland s famous Lake View Cemetery with its Tiffany-designed chapel and assassinated President Garfield s tomb. Factories visited included those making potato chips (Brewster), beer (Cleveland), carved wooden merry-go-round horses (Mansfield), hand-dipped chocolates (North Canton), hand-loomed rugs (Smithville), and pipe organs for churches (Orrville). Youngstown museums visited included the Butler Institute of American Art, the Historical Center of Industry and Labor, and the history of medicine museum on the campus of Youngstown State University. In 2007 a busload went to the Victorian Riverside Inn dinner theater in Cambridge, Pennsylvania. Another mystery trip went to Kingwood Gardens, the Ohio Reformatory and downtown Mansfield s General Electric museum. After the fad for mystery trips fizzled, road trips to known destinations, such as the one to the Alliance area in 2012, became popular. The latter featured a feline memorabilia museum (located in a . . . house), guided tours of nineteenth-century historical register homes, and the World Wars I and II Art Museum.

June K. Burton 4/29/12