



From the President...

By Debby Weintraub

The past few months have been a time of enormous changes and challenges; the ordinary became the extraordinary, the simple became complicated. So, I want to give a very heartfelt thank you and acknowledgment to the various PRO members who have been working on our behalf during the upheavals of COVID-19.



Our Board had our first ever zoom meeting this June. The most crucial issue the Board discussed was the discovery that Trustmark (became previously Caremark-connected to the PPO Anthem Blue Cross) had been refusing to pay for appointments with doctors that were not part of the Teledoc system. Thus, after Medicare paid their portion of a telemedicine appointment, retirees were charged for all remaining costs.

PLEASED AND PROUD

However, PRO quickly challenged the lack of payment, first with Trustmark and then with phone calls and letters to the District requesting that retirees' costs for telemedicine appointment with retirees' own doctors be paid in full.

As a result of our efforts and the quick cooperation of the District's HR and Benefits Office, Trustmark is now paying all costs Medicare does not cover for all telemedicine appointments. In addition, everyone will be reimbursed for payments they may have made before this issue was resolved. If you have experienced any problems with payment for a telemedicine appointment you had, you should contact the District Benefits Office.

PRO is very pleased and proud to have been so instrumental in protecting retirees' (and actives') health benefits. We are also thankful to PFT President Jennifer Shanowski for her immediate support and help in resolving this problem.

Another vital item we addressed at the Board meeting was the state of the OPEB Bonds after being alerted by PRO member Mark Greenside that OPEB Bonds appeared to be on the agenda at the Board of Trustee meeting in May.

STUDENTS TRADE CLASSROOM FOR ONLINE

Peralta students were forced to go online once the Covid19 virus struck the Peralta campuses in March. Classroom instructors had to adjust. The results produced varying experiences. Page 7.



Ericka Jackson

We invited Trustee Bill Withrow to speak with us about OPEB Bonds and the two trust funds that have been established. We learned that the OPEB Bonds, which generate money used to support pre-July 1, 2004 hires' lifetime benefits are doing well, and retirees do not need to be concerned about the viability of their lifetime benefits right now. It is important to remember that the District is responsible for pre-July 1, 2004 hires' lifetime benefits regardless of how the OPEB Bonds are doing. Yet it was good to know the OPEB Bonds are still helping cover lifetime health care costs, particularly during this public health and economic crisis.

PRO both advocates for and protects our affordable health care in retirement. We have what millions of Americans unfortunately do not. Many of the essential workers (often African Americans and other non-white people) whom we are thankful for now, from delivery persons to health care workers (and teachers) will have no health care in retirement and often none or costly care while they are doing their essential jobs. I believe PRO should be on the forefront of advocating for affordable health care and

(See From the President, page 2)

Inside This Issue . . .

Viewpoints: Struggle and Loss . P. 3

The Splendors of Sumela P. 4

PRO Wins Telemedicine Access P. 6

A Baby Boomer Remembers . . . P. 6

(From the President, from page 1)

reliable pensions for all.

We are fortunate too as our pensions remain solid; hopefully many of you read the two emails posted on the PRO website regarding CALSTRS and CALPERS financial assessments.

Burt Dragin created our first on-line newsletter in response to the limitations of printing options during the pandemic. He has persisted in soliciting articles and photos while coordinating with the layout professionals. Jerry Herman continues to edit.

***I CANNOT CLOSE WITHOUT
ACKNOWLEDGING THE HISTORIC
EVENTS OF THE LAST SEVERAL WEEKS
SINCE GEORGE FLOYD WAS KILLED***

Eight members of PRO: Jerry Herman, Anne Elliot, Marie Wilson, Jose Ortiz, Edy Chan, Catherine Crystal, Celia Correa and I read the PRO Scholarship applications and selected the finalists. Each of the four students selected each received a \$750.00 award.

Karolyn Van Putten, Sue Chin and Rebecca Stone continue to take care of mail, data base and thank you notes for financial contributions to our scholarship fund.

Bruce Jacobs never slows down managing his triple

duties as bookkeeper, webmaster and Vice President as marvelously as he always does. And as usual, he answers emails and calls from concerned PRO members, particularly about health care issues; he was on the front line of resolving the telemedicine payments from Trustmark.

The Board also decided to create a PRO FaceBook page after our Secretary, Judith Cohen, suggested it as a way to increase outreach and help us keep in communication with people, particularly during the pandemic, but beyond as well. As has been mentioned numerous times, PRO is seriously lacking both people and financial resources and we are hoping the FaceBook page will be helpful in generating needed resources as well. Judith followed up by enlisting PRO member Bob Flemming to design and set up the page.

I cannot close without acknowledging the historic events of the last several weeks since George Floyd was killed. I am still overwhelmed.

The Black Lives Matter movement has highlighted the particular inequities and injustices experienced every day upon the Black community. But we have also been asked to look at systematic racism and acknowledge the depth to which it pervades our society and culture. I feel this is an important moment in our history. How we respond collectively and individually will shape the future. I hope we commit ourselves to eradicating racism in all its forms. ♦

**Contributions Received for the
PRO Scholarship Fund**

Contributor(s)	In Honor Of:
Rip Talavera	Ernestine Camp
Contributor(s)	In Memory of:
Susan W. Chin	Brian Tsai
Susan W. Chin	Ida Pound
Kenneth K Hurst	George Herring
Antoinette Lesperance	Ida Pound
Hecto Edward Lopez	Dr. I. B. Pound
John S Luther	Shirley Conner
Edward Minasian	Ida Pound
John & Anna Pavelka-Lodato	Charlie Harris
Rip Talavera	Juanita Peterson
Michael J Wirth	Ida Pound

Peralta Retirees Organization

484 Lake Park Ave., #598
Oakland, CA 94610-2730

<http://www.peraltaretirees.org>

President – Debby Weintraub
info@peraltaretirees.org

Vice-President – Bruce Jacobs
Secretary – Judith Cohen

Treasurer – open

Past President – Jerry Herman

Board of Directors

Karen Anderson
Burt Dragin
Alex Pappas
Stan Peters

The Peralta Retiree

Editor – Burt Dragin
burtdragin@aol.com

The Peralta Retiree is published four times a year by
the Peralta Retirees Organization (PRO)

Volume 16 Number 4

VIEWPOINTS

STRUGGLE AND LOSS

PHOTOS / DEBRA WEINTRAUB

WAKE UP U.S. AMERICA!

When a ball player kneels upon the turf to protest for justice when a bar-room song made sacred is played, he is vilified & fired. But when police take their knees to the necks of their victims or shoot them, more often than not it is called “In the line of duty.” Do we not see because we sleep or are we blind like we like to portray justice? Unbind her eyes that she may see that her scales are out of balance, that she is not color-blind & if she is to correct it. In the vision of the Tao black & white are equal, one no more of value than the other but her scales are weighted to the white, all shades of black not counting for much. Is it because we sleep? If it is only sleep, Wake up U.S. America! If it is that we refuse to see, may the gods help us.

© Rafael Jesús González 2020

IN MEMORIAL

The following Peralta retirees have passed away. PRO extends our deepest condolences to their families and loved ones.

George Nakamura**Elizabeth Rhoades**

Please contact Burt Dragin at: burtdragin@aol.com or by writing to PRO, 484 Lake Park Ave., #598, Oakland, CA 94610-2730

DESPIERTA EE.UU. AMÉRICA!

Cuando un jugador de pelota se hinca sobre la hierba para protestar por la justicia cuando se toca una canción de cantina hecha sagrada, se le denigra y despide. Pero cuando la policía ponen la rodilla al cuello de sus víctimas o les disparan más veces que no se le llama “Cumpliendo su deber.” ¿No vemos porque dormimos o somos ciegos como nos gusta representar a la justicia? Quitémosle la venda de los ojos para que vea que su báscula está fuera de balance, que no es daltónica y si lo es que lo corrija. En la visión del Tao lo negro y lo blanco son equivalentes, uno no más de valor que el otro pero su báscula se desequilibra a favor de lo blanco, todo matiz de negro no contando por mucho. ¿Será porque dormimos? Si solamente es que dormimos ¡Despierta EE.UU. América! Si es que nos negamos a ver ¡Que nos ayuden los dioses!

© Rafael Jesús González 2020

RORSCHACH FOR OUR TIME

A police officer with his knee on the neck of a black man crying in vain reveals a Rorschach test none of us can ignore /we take peaceably to the streets, or watch media in futility, or trash police cars, break something, brace for the inevitable cry of law & order from the White House/yet knowing too well the answer that will not arrive/the stop action examination of—why? /History is not on our side with its state-sanctioned hatred and still we have uniformed men licensed to do violence while some of us recall the Sixties chant in Selma “the whole world is watching” while today the whole world *is* watching but the uniformed man bent on violence just does not care

*Burt Dragin***WAKE OF NO LEADERSHIP**

In the wake of no leadership (“it’s a hoax, George is looking down and liking what he sees,” “when looting starts, shooting starts”), I resent being left to witness another atrocity/pandemic with inadequate information. I resent the “us vs. them” dichotomy created by both the response to the virus and the murder of George Floyd. I am old enough to have been in and through protests, and after over 30 years of teaching, I also resent “white silence is violence” approach to some protests.

These protests seem to have more backbone than some earlier events. I hope that in November we can come to our senses and begin addressing our issues in a civilized, adult manner.

Tom Turman

WHERE IN THE WORLD HAVE YOU BEEN?

My Travels in Turkey's Sumela Region

By Roger Newman

In the late summer of 2015 on a trip to the Caucasus countries of the Republic of Georgia and Armenia, my wife Audre and I stopped for a few days at the charming city of Trabzon in northeastern Turkey.

Located on the southern shore of the Black Sea, Trabzon lies at the base of mountains that rise to the Anatolian Plateau and collect enough rainfall to be considered a temperate rainforest. The rushing rivers flowing from the Anatolian Plateau provide a very attractive holiday destination for Turks from Istanbul, Izmir and Ankara, as well as Arabs and others from neighboring countries. On a couple of day-long excursions from the city we traveled with Turkish visitors in small vans to see the countryside and local attractions. Interacting with our fellow travelers was just as enjoyable as seeing the sights.

The fame of Trabzon through history extends from the fifth century BCE when the Athenian general and philosopher Xenophon led his Ten Thousand hoplites in their epic retreat over land from Mesopotamia, south of Turkey, the present site of Iraq. These exploits are described in the Anabasis, considered one of the great adventure stories of all time. The Athenians had hired on as mercenaries for Cyrus, the Persian pretender to the throne. After marching from Ionia to Mesopotamia, the Athenians won their first battle but lost their patron Cyrus in the battle. Without either payment or a cause to fight for, they suffered greatly on the retreat and rejoiced on seeing the Black Sea at Trabzon, the first Greek settlement they reached.

IN THE MIDDLE AGES TRABZON WAS A PORT FOR ASIAN GOODS BROUGHT OVER FROM THE SILK ROAD.

From the 4th century CE Trabzon was an important center of Christianity. We were able to visit the Monastery of Sumela which you can see in some of the photos. Its dramatic setting at about 4000 feet elevation and the well-preserved buildings and frescoes draw many domestic and a few international tourists.

In the Middle Ages, Trabzon was a port for Asian goods brought over the Silk Road and transported by Italian traders to Europe. It benefited from the Pax Mongolica which made possible large scale trade from the mid 13th century conquests of Genghis Khan and his sons and



grandsons until the decline of their empire resulting from the spread of the bubonic plague.

A very entertaining day trip out of Trabzon took us to the banks of the Ayder River which drops from the Anatolian Plateau to the Black Sea. Rafting companies there organize white water rafting trips and had a zip line set up across the river. We found a charming riverside cafe from which we could watch the mix of excitement and dread on the faces of the people getting ready to zip across the river. The Turkish dress code for women requires only a head scarf, but the Saudi tourists maintained their modesty in full-body burqas.

Leaving Trabzon we proceeded by bus to the international border with Georgia and crossed to the city of Batumi. Our main destinations were Georgia and Armenia in the Caucasus Mountains region between the Black and Caspian Seas. We had a lot more historic lands to explore, starting with ancient Colchis, the home of the sorceress Medea and the Golden Fleece, both of which would be abducted by Jason and his Argonauts.

We also wanted to see the huge migration of birds along the eastern edge of the Black Sea as they funneled out of northern Eurasia for wintering grounds farther south. Near the seaside resort of Batumi are small hills from which we were able to witness the flight of hundreds of thousands of birds, mostly honey buzzards and European bee-eaters. They choose this route to take advantage of thermal updrafts and to avoid the Black Sea and the high Caucasus Mountains which rise to over 18,000 feet, including Mt Elbrus, the highest peak in Europe.

I'll have more on the Caucasus in future articles. ♦

(See Travels, page 5)

Images of Turkey's Sumela



Counter-clockwise from top right: Sumela Monastery—Byzantine murals; Turkish young women; Sumela Monastery; Close-up of mural; Temperate forest in the Ayder Gorge, NE Turkey—Turkish young women watching the zip-line; Rafting under a Turkish bridge on the Ayder River; Audre with Turkish travelers; “We don't have anything like this in Saudi Arabia.”



Photos by Roger and Audre Newman

PRO Effort Leads District Agreement to Pay for Telemedicine Visits

By Bruce Jacobs

I was surprised when I received an Explanation of Benefits notice from Trustmark (CoreSource's new name) showing that they had not paid the balance for a visit with my physician. The visit had been scheduled back in December for late March, but because of the virus and the governor's order to shelter-in-place, the doctor's office had suggested that I do it using their telemedicine system. The idea was that if the doctor decided I needed an in-person appointment we could schedule it after the telemedicine session.

I called customer service at Trustmark to ask why they had not covered their share (after Medicare's benefit) and was told that telemedicine visits were not covered by the District unless they were done through TeleDoc, a service with which the District had contracted. The representative suggested that I read the SPD (Summary Plan Description) that covered me (pre-July 1, 2004 retiree) in order to understand the basis for their decision.

When I looked at the SPD I found the following description of covered services:

"Covered services shall include the following services when performed by a *physician* or a *professional provider*:

1. Medical treatment, services and supplies **including, but not limited to**: office visits, *inpatient* visits, home visits." [my emphasis]

To me it seemed clear that although there was no specific mention of telemedicine visits, the phrase "**including, but not limited to**" meant that there was no reason for the coverage to be excluded, given that the SPD language was written in 2004 before the widespread availability of the technology and especially in light of the pandemic. Further, it seemed to me to be completely unreasonable to expect me to use TeleDoc when my regular physician was available and the visit was not an emergency.

I contacted others in PRO and jointly we contacted the PFT because we felt that the District policy of not covering the telemedicine physician's visits would adversely affect active employees as well as retirees, and that they would not have Medicare to negotiate a reduced rate and pay a large portion of the cost. The union agreed and said they would take it up in negotiations. At the same time, as PRO's Vice-President, I decided to contact Vice-Chancellor Chanelle Whittaker and ask that the District change its policy about not covering telemedicine physician's visits. The result, I'm happy to report, was that the District indicated that it would change its policy and cover these visits as it would any office visit. They agreed to instruct Trustmark to re-process all claims that had been denied.

If you have a claim that was processed by Trustmark denying coverage for a telemedicine visit with your physician, you should contact them to make certain they are re-processing your claim. ♦

My Grandson's Career: I'm Proud and Scared

By Karen Anderson

Born in Chicago at the end of WWII, I had gained adulthood by the time of the Civil Rights Movement. When Dr. Martin Luther King was assaulted near my home I joined the newly established Operation Breadbasket formed by Rev Jesse Jackson. It later became known as Operation PUSH (People United to Save Humanity) and promoted economic equality and non-violent action through boycotts, sit-ins and picketing. By the time I completed graduate work and began a career in public school education, I had sharpened my teeth on protests and anti establishment demonstration. The struggle for self identification from Negro to African American defined my identity. The Black Panthers' chant of 'kill the pigs' was a given response for police enforcement.

Fast forward 50 years.

My 23 year old grandson was recently sworn in as a Berkeley police officer. He has been focused on becoming a policeman since he was old enough to play with toy police cars. (Remember Tonka toys?) He loved black and whites. He never considered an alternative career.

Because I thought he might be fascinated with uniforms, I had lengthy chats with him about careers in the military or firefighting but he was adamantly clear—he would be a policeman.

There was never a question that he would attend college. The only decision to be made was which major course of study would give him depth as a police officer.

(See Boomer, page 10)

College Students Grapple with Online Course Life

This article is published with permission by Ed-Source (<https://edsources.org/2020/california-college-students-grapple-with-finishing-semester-online/631739>) It originally appeared in Peralta Community College District student publication The Citizen (<https://www.peraltacitizen.com/students-grapple-with-finishing-semester-online/>)

By Kasper Dilmaghani, Staff Writer/Copy Editor, and Isis Piccillo, Editor-in-Chief

After a hastily rescheduled spring break and two weeks of canceled classes, the Peralta Community College District transitioned to fully-online instruction on April 6, but students' experiences reflect a wide range of preparedness and access to resources.

Some students juggle facilitating their children's remote education while also trying to learn themselves. Students who are still employed struggle to balance work and school, while others grapple with the financial instability of unemployment. Even students with fewer responsibilities—and with more consistent access to technology and the internet—face hardships.

Regardless of how they are managing the transition to online learning, all students face challenges and unknowns they could not have foreseen at the beginning of the semester. Here are some of their stories.

REBECCA GALICIA

"I'm just trying to do the best that I can."

Rebecca Galicia is an undergraduate student at Mills College. She is also enrolled at Laney College, where she is taking anatomy in order to complete her bachelor's in sociology and transfer to a graduate program at California State University, East Bay. Galicia is no stranger to overcoming challenges. She is determined not to delay earning her undergraduate degree.

"I made a goal to be finished with my undergrad by the time I was 40," Galicia said. "I'm going to be 40 this year."



Rebecca Galicia

She said that in a previous relationship, her ex used to sabotage her school work.

"He used to hide my keys, and throw water on my books and stuff, to try to prevent me from going to school."

After managing to leave that relationship almost five years ago, Galicia returned to school with a new sense of freedom. As a mother of five children; she and her current partner have worked together to take care of the kids while she pursues her education.

"I was not going to let anything hold me back and I wanted to finish so I can get on with being able to pursue a career that I enjoy," Galicia said.

"I wasn't ready for today."

ERICKA JACKSON

Ericka Jackson, 46, is attending Laney College for her fourth try at community college since the mid-90's. This semester she's enrolled in a theater class and a journalism class: a total of seven units. The rest of the week, she works as a care provider for the Alameda Health Services In-Home Supportive Services.

When Peralta classes resumed online on April 6, Jackson found herself struggling with Zoom. It was only her second time using the platform. Her theater instructor shared the link in their class text messaging app, but she wasn't sure how to get it from her phone to her iPad.



Laney College student Ericka Jackson uses her iPad on a makeshift desk of pillows.

"I wasn't ready for today. I mean, I was: I'm up and dressed with my hair brushed, and some coffee," she reflected, but she still wasn't sure she could access the link in time for the 11 a.m. class.

She said she used to be consistently fifteen to thirty minutes late to class and sometimes struggled to find a seat in the packed auditorium. On Zoom, that won't be a problem.

Jackson eventually managed to open the link on her iPad, the screen of which is often unresponsive to light touches, firm taps, and hard knocks alike.

"It's not cracked or damaged or anything, it's just, I

(See Online Courses, page 8)

(Online Courses, from page 7)

think it needs to get serviced,” she said. She had put off going to the Apple Store until shelter-in-place suddenly made it impossible. She purchased a Bluetooth keyboard mid-semester that helped decrease usage of the screen.

When Laney College opened a Chromebook-lending program, Jackson signed up.

With the Chromebook, Jackson said it’s been easier to complete assignments, even as she struggles to navigate new technology and help her nephew handle his own online classes at the same time. She said she has no plans to drop her classes.

“Sometimes I wonder about [the transition] working, but I’m excited about it working,” she said, “so I won’t forget about how to go to school.”

“I’ve never signed up for an online class for a reason.”

LEIGH SNODGRASS

Leigh Snodgrass is a returning student with hopes of transferring and earning a bachelor of science in nursing. A part-time student this spring, Leigh was taking nine units, attempting to complete two of the required nursing track classes. Prior to the Bay Area’s stay-at-home orders, Leigh had already been experiencing issues in her chemistry class.



Leigh Snodgrass gets to work studying on the makeshift desk she set up on her porch.

“Not because of the material, I think I would actually really like the material—I just happen to really bristle against the teaching style of the professor,” she said.

The problems Snodgrass was experiencing worsened as her classes transitioned online.

“When I found out everything was going to be distance learning, I was kind of like, ‘that’s not what I wanted, and I’ve never signed up for an online class for a reason,’” Snodgrass said.

She said there was a lack of communication from her professor about how the class would be approaching the transition online. Even when Snodgrass emailed her professor, she said she received only an ambiguous response that lacked details about how she was expected to return as an online student.

At the beginning of the week, Snodgrass was already mulling the idea of dropping her chemistry class due to the lack of communication from her instructor. Her ex-

perience with her anatomy professor was the opposite, as she had a clear understanding of what was expected when classes resumed online.

“Our anatomy teacher has been super on top of things, and has been sending us a lot of information in the interim: of what things will look like and what the expectations are and when we will meet,” she said.

However, even anatomy had its share of disappointments since the hands-on learning aspects are no longer available without face-to-face instruction.

“With the anatomy class, I’m just kind of disappointed because we were about to get into a cadaver dissection workshop, and there were also opportunities to dissect sheep brains in class and a lot more, it’s obviously a very hands-on subject,” she explained.

She decided to stay enrolled in anatomy, but drop chemistry and retake it another semester.

“I just kind of hit that point, it wasn’t gonna happen,” she concluded.

“I don’t really feel too optimistic about the future.”

JEREMY WONG

Jeremy Wong is a computer science major taking 15 units this semester, and he plans to transfer to a four-year university. His plans have not changed due to the pandemic, but his road to completing the requirements has.

“I am considering dropping some classes, specifically my CIS [Computer Information Systems] class. I love the interaction between students. It was much easier to get advice and also help, because with computer science, there’s a lot of things that could go wrong with whatever it is you’re programming,” Wong said.

Electing whether to sign up for online versus in-person classes comes down to a personal choice for most students. According to a 2014 Columbia University study, “most students preferred to take only “easy” academic subjects online; they preferred to take “difficult” or “important” subjects face-to-face.”



Jeremy Wong sets up his desk on the dining room table.

Regardless of difficulty, Wong said, “I mostly am a fan of in-person classes.”

A majority of teachers share his preference, and according to a 2019 EDUCAUSE study amongst faculty, nearly 75% of faculty prefer a teaching environment that is either completely or mostly face-to-face. This is in stark

(See Online Courses, page 9)

(Online Courses, from page 8)

contrast to 9% of faculty who reported that they prefer to teach mostly or completely online.

For Wong, taking his computer science class online is less than ideal. His initial thoughts about dropping his computer science class have persisted. The nearly three-week hiatus from classes due to Covid-19 has disrupted his study routines.

“I haven’t really had good study habits. The three weeks of no school, no classes. No pretty much, schedule, of like, my usual daily routine. It’s definitely compounded that issue a lot more,” he said.

Over the first week of transitioning to online learning, Wong has worried about what’s next.

“I don’t really feel too optimistic about the future, mostly in regards to returning to normal. I do want to reach that point where we don’t have to worry about the pandemic anymore. That we can go back to in-person studies, because that is definitely something that I have missed,” he said.

Like many students, he wants to know whether he needs to get used to the way things are for the rest of 2020.

“If I have to stay like this then I have to, like, start re-thinking about how I study in the future, essentially.”

“I care a lot about technology, technological literacy.”

Tyler Bennett is currently waitlisted for UC Berkeley for the Fall of 2020. He is a full-time student and tutor for three classes at Berkeley City College. For him, the transition to online learning has proved to be mostly seamless.

“I can do everything online, like, I have access to the internet, and I’m very fortunate there. I care a lot about technology, technological literacy.”

As a tutor, Bennett helps students navigate online teaching platforms.

TYLER BENNETT

“One of the biggest roles that I play, outside of just helping my instructor reinforce the material, is tech support. I help people set up Canvas on their phones, [and] access Google Drives that all the material is hosted on,” he said.

For Bennett, everything seems to point towards being ready for the transition to online learning. But current events do not come without



Tyler Bennett buckles down to study at his desk in Berkeley.

their fair share of stresses, ones that no student has had to prepare for in any semester of community college.

“I am someone who had pneumonia in the past, and I do suffer from asthma and so, like, if I do get coronavirus I don’t think I will be able to continue to do classes,” he said.

Although Bennett may have all the necessary tools and skills to take classes online, his health vulnerabilities are a source of stress that under circumstances prior to Covid-19 were not as concerning. Due to these unexpected times certain overtures by professors are essential to ensuring as smooth a transition to online learning as possible.

Bennett said that in one class where he’s an embedded tutor, the instructor showed the type of flexibility that demonstrates compassion. In comparison, he said that in a different class, the teacher neglected to make changes to account for disruptions due to campus closures.

With students facing stressful situations that they could not have prepared for before the semester began, Bennett says he hopes faculty and administration can be flexible and work with them to adapt to these unexpected times.

“A lot of students, if they weren’t a part of student government, they wouldn’t know what’s happening.”

SPENCER STAGGERS-ELMORE

Spencer Stagers-Elmore knows he is better equipped for the new learning environment than the average Peralta student. As president of the Associated Students of Merritt College, he attends district meetings and joins in administrative conversations as a student leader. Stagers-Elmore is also a full-time student and tutors history and social science at the Learning Center.

Stagers-Elmore is an anthropology major and was recently accepted to the University of California, Berkeley. He will start classes in the fall.

“Teachers have been very accommodating,” he said, noting that his instructors spent time discussing student needs, gathering resources, and using guest lecturers to ease students into learning fully online. He’s taking a range of social sciences classes, including sociology, where he said the class is making connections between effects of the pandemic and course material.

Although classes are going smoothly, he said his tutoring job at the Merritt College Learning Center has been



Spencer Stagers-Elmore, Associated Students of Merritt College president and learning center tutor, often uses an outdoor space at his Castro Valley home for classes, meetings, and work.

(See Online Courses, page 10)

(Grandson, from page 6)

When he graduated from U.C. Santa Barbara last year with a degree in Psychology I was proud.

When he graduated from the California Law Enforcement Academy Seven months later I was in awe.

When I learned about the local protests regarding the death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police I was horrified.

When I heard that my grandson had been assigned to back up Oakland police during the ongoing protests I felt nervous.

When he was called 'pig' by some of the protesters I was terrified. I am still proud and scared for him.

And us. ♦

(Online Courses, from page 10)

more challenging. He works nearly 20 hours a week, in addition to 12 units of classes and his leadership position as student body president. The tutors will be using newly-ubiquitous meeting platform Zoom, which Stagers-Elmore said he's been familiar with long before the pandemic, thanks to his work in student government.

In other ways, the shelter-in-place order has made his job as student body president easier.

He used to commute to other campuses, as far as Alameda, to meet with other campus leadership, but now he doesn't need to leave his home for those meetings. The hours of meetings can get draining, though, especially since student leaders are expected to show their faces.

"I can't just walk away like how other people are doing their classes in Zoom."

Stagers-Elmore said he sees a spectrum of preparedness from students in all his roles as a classmate, student leader, and tutor. He addressed the students' need for clearer communication from the district during the March 24 Board of Trustees meeting, while also emphasizing student appreciation for the work being done to keep instruction going.

"A lot of students, if they weren't a part of student government, they wouldn't know what's happening," he said. ♦

Welcome New Members

PRO welcomes the following members who have recently joined

Bill Andrews
Chuen Chan
Rose Crowder
Timothy Hackett

Peralta Retirees Organization
484 Lake Park Ave., #598
Oakland, CA 94610-2730