



From the President...

Time for new faces

Due to the pandemic, PRO has not held in-person membership meetings since 2019. Traditionally, at those November membership meetings, we voted on Board members and officers for PRO. The newly elected officers would step into their positions in January.



Debby Weintraub

Covid has led us on a strange and surprising path these last few years so I don't know if we will be able to hold an in-person membership meeting this fall. But it is definitely time to elect new officers to the Board and hopefully to have some new faces serving alongside the current Board.

I will be stepping down as President of PRO, a position that I have held for over eight years. It is my time to stop serving PRO in this capacity. I hope by January of 2024 (when new officers would be installed) most of our urgent health care problems will be resolved. I expect that there will be clear reimbursement and dispute processes that honor the contractual obligation the District has to retirees with lifetime benefits.

I am hopeful that we will have a written document that re-affirms the District's promise to "make retirees whole" and that we all understand what that truly means.

I am hopeful that we will have a written document that re-affirms the District's promise to "make retirees whole" and that we all understand what that truly means. I am anticipating that the District will also have hired some additional support staff for the Benefits Office so that questions, concerns, and even complaints can be answered in a timely fashion.

The PRO Board and many of you in the PRO community have been working hard to set the ship right itself

UPDATE . . . At the time of the writing of Bruce and Debby's pieces there was, as they state, no District reimbursement policy. Since that time Vice Chancellor of Human Services, Dr. Ronald McKinley has issued a reimbursement policy, which was mailed to all Peralta retirees who have lifetime health benefits.

since the unions and District decided to join SISC and stop being self-insured. It has been a tumultuous and chaotic journey at times, and I know it is stressful for retirees and their families. I have tried to be an active advocate for retirees, but I also see the need for new leadership. I think that new voices and new energetic leadership will be beneficial for all of us.

I have been deeply tied to Peralta for 50 years. And I know I am only one of many of you who have given so much to Peralta, some for longer than I have. Jerry Herman and Bruce Jacobs are two original members of PRO and still devote much of their time to this organization. I applaud their dedication and deeply appreciate the years they have given to help me and all retirees. And as many of you know, Bruce has been spectacularly focused on seeing that the transition to this new health care went as well as it could. No words can express our gratitude for Bruce's tireless efforts over the past year.

I hope to remain on the Board and to be a good foot soldier for PRO, which is probably what I am more constitutionally suited for at this time. Thanks for letting me serve you. It has been my honor. This newsletter should have multiple articles that highlight the work PRO has been doing to protect our lifetime benefits. I hope all of you that appreciate our work will consider being more actively involved, including serving on the PRO Board. ♦

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Two dozen PRO members show up at Trustees March 28 meeting

By Debby Weintraub

We came on the cold, damp evening of March 28 to address the changes to our benefits before the Board of Trustees, Chancellor and the extended Peralta community. We came across bridges, through tunnels, with friends, partners and former colleagues, bundled in our jackets to ward off the crisp night air in the atrium of the District Board room. We came because we were determined to let the Peralta family know how important our health care is to us and that things must change. PRO came to be heard and seen. There were at least two dozen of us representing many more, and with hundreds of years of service to the District.

The Board of Trustees and others in attendance also know that the District has a contractual obligation to retirees with lifetime benefits.

Unfortunately, the transition to the new health care plans has not been seamless as advertised. In fact, it has been very hard, even devastating for some retirees and their families. Prescription drug costs, affordable before January of 2023 now are hundreds of dollars more for some of us. Services once provided are now reduced or not available. And equally unsettling has been the unanswered questions – simple questions that anyone that is suddenly in a new health care plan would want answers to: Will my hearing aids be covered? Will the non-generic drug my doctor prescribes for me be covered? How do I navigate the new payment processes? The District has failed on every level to communicate effectively with retirees at a crucial period in the transition to new health care plans

Newsletter seeks your feedback

We want to hear from you. Do you have ideas for Newsletter articles? Critique of the Newsletter? Letters to the editor? Please direct any comments to me with subject line Newsletter Feedback at burtdragin@aol.com.

—Burt Dragin

So, the night we came, the Board of Trustees, Chancellor Jackson and Vice Chancellor of Human Resources Dr. McKinley knew why we were there because they have been hearing from many of us over the last few months. They know some retirees have had their benefits reduced, that some are confused or unsure about their coverage and they know that all of us have no idea how the reimbursement process works because they have yet to formalize a process. Or reimburse anyone. They know too that the District Benefits Office is sorely understaffed. There are simply not enough humans working in that office to answer the questions or keep up with the work of transitioning to the new health care plans in so short a time.

The Board of Trustees and others in attendance also know that the District has a contractual obligation to retirees with lifetime benefits. The language from the PFT contract—and also similar in the other union contracts states: “All regular and contract faculty retiring from the District during the term of this Agreement **shall be**

(See Trustees Meeting on page 6)

Peralta Retirees Organization

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The *Peralta Retiree* is published four times a year by the Peralta Retirees Organization (PRO)
Volume 19 Number 3

St. Mary's basketball star

Odell Johnson's need for executive photo reveals a host of honors—on and off court

By Gisele Bonds

(Editor's note: The writer is an award-winning photographer based in Oakland. Her piece honors Odell Johnson as part of Black History Month.)

In the Summer of 2012, I was contacted by former Laney College President Odell Johnson because he needed a new executive portrait. Today's Positive Images Black History Moment is all about why Odell Johnson was history personified, walking into my studio.

His immediate need for a new portrait was triggered because after serving as president of Laney College for 17 years, the campus was about to name its theater The Odell Johnson Performing Arts Center. He was instrumental in securing important developments at the college through very difficult times, including an arts wing of the campus.

Those of us familiar with the Oakland campus know it has a uniquely shaped triangular administration building that has the school's name in green neon script wrapped around all three sides. That day, I learned that the neon

light was made from the words written in Johnson's handwriting. When the sign was replaced in 2016, Johnson was given the original O from the sign as a keepsake.

However, this was not the first time Odell Johnson made news headlines. He was a basketball star at St. Mary's College in 1958. The 40 points he scored against Pepperdine in 1956 is the No. 2 single-game total in school history. Mr. Johnson has been recognized as one of SMC's Top 25 all-time men's basketball student-athletes, WCC Hall of Honor and the 2016 Saint Mary's College Alumni of the Year.



Odell Johnson

Photo by Gisele Bonds

(See Odell Johnson on page 7)

Letters to the editor:

The passing of Ralph Marinaro

This past Christmas Eve, my dad, Ralph Marinaro, passed away (just 8 months after my mom). Today (Jan. 17) he was laid to rest at the Sacramento Valley National Cemetery. My Dad bestowed his gifts and larger than life spirit upon his friends and family just by being with them. He will be missed, but not forgotten. Every time someone puts on a funny hat, tells a bad pun, picks up a guitar or finds a quarter in the couch cushions, he's there.

Dad, thanks for the good things you shared with us, and as for the rest . . . there's nothing more to say. Maybe next time around you'll make some different choices. Maybe not. Whatever you decide, I wish you fair winds and following seas.

Rex Marinaro

Newsletter provides valuable service

Burt, this is to thank you for editing the PRO newsletter. This last issue is great.

Keeping us abreast of current issues and changes to our retirement benefits is number one on my preference from the newsletter.

Managing finances in retirement is surprisingly time-consuming and can be confusing (home mgmt, taxes, insurance, living trust/wills, healthcare, etc.). PRO covers essential matter for our financial management. Plus, it's a welcome connection with our fellow retirees

Catching up with former co-workers is nice, but again, I love PRO and the newsletter to keep me on track with managing financial retirement matters.

Nancy (Delaney) River

PRO's Weintraub, Jacobs lead passionate speakers at PCCD board meeting

Debby Weintraub addresses Board

First, I want to thank Chancellor Jackson, the Board of Trustees and the District personnel here tonight for your service to the District and for taking the time to really listen to me as I speak tonight.

My name is Debra Weintraub and I am the current president of the PRO and I am here to address retiree health care. But, most of you know why we are here because most of you have received emails or phone calls from retirees and people from the Human Resources and the Benefits Office have been to multiple meetings with us as well.

I imagine the sight of our names popping up in your emails brings a knowing look. You know we have had a reduction in benefits.

The transition to the medical plans has not been seamless for anyone as far as I can tell. And for some it has been financially and emotionally very hard—even devastating. Some retirees have lost medical services, and others, even current employees have had to leave vital medications at the pharmacy—walking away because the cost was significantly higher—sometimes hundreds of dollars more than they had been paying before January, 2023

And often, in fact, most of the time even simple questions that people have are going unanswered—will my hearing aids or non-generic drugs prescribed by my doctor still be covered? Will I be reimbursed? These are basic questions that anyone in a new plan would have. But we get silence—no response at all.

Why?

PRO doesn't think it is for lack of concern or caring on the part of the people being asked though it sometimes feels that way.

It is because there is no reimbursement process in place, because the Benefits Office is understaffed and overwhelmed and the folks at Retirees First need direction from the District to answer certain questions.

This is precisely why we requested to be on the agenda. We want actions taken now to ensure that money is spent to
(See Debby's Address on page 7)

Bruce Jacobs addresses Board

I'm Bruce Jacobs, vice-president of PRO and a retiree of the District.

I'm here because I believe that the implementation of the new benefits system has been so problematic, so full of negative impacts for many individuals, that it requires you to give direction to the administration to take actions to begin to alleviate the problems.

These problems include a failure to communicate with retirees who have had questions about diminution of their benefits in anything like a timely way, a Benefits Office that is understaffed and despite a huge effort by the staff unable to respond to the many problems and snafus that are the result of the rushed and poorly planned implementation of the changes, and finally, the failure of the District, despite promises, to arrange for reimbursement for expenses that are not covered by the new arrangements but were by the old.

Let me give you some examples: One retiree sent multiple emails to the Benefits Office at the end of February concerning the diminished coverage for hearing aids and asking if the District was committed to making up the difference. Because he was planning to travel for a multi-month trip he needed to complete the process of acquiring the new hearing aids by the end of April. He never received a single response to his inquiries. The reduction in benefits, by the way, is \$2000.

Another example: After months of recognizing that the Benefits Office was understaffed, Vice Chancellor of Human Resources Dr. Ronald McKinley sent an email saying the District would like to hire some retirees to help out. At last! The only thing is that there is so little information about the prospective jobs, that it is very hard to solicit retirees who might be interested.

And another example: A retired instructor from Merritt College has had to lay out over \$140 more than he would have under the Trustmark policy for prescriptions and for fees for a provider who does not accept Medicare Assignment. He recently was faced with a \$1000 co-pay

(See Bruce's Address on page 6)



Toni L'Esperance and Elaine Chen Ramirez



Bruce Jacobs



Debby Weintraub



PRO members

Trustees Meeting

(Continued from page 2)

offered lifetime medical coverage at District expense that is consistent with the coverage offered to active employees at the time of retirement. This includes spouse and dependents.” (Article 22, F-3B)

We came to speak because despite countless meetings, emails, phone calls and texts regarding the problems retirees have been facing, nothing was happening.

We came because we had some very simple tasks, but tasks that would require some District expenditures and a desire on the District’s part to do something and do it soon, not months from now.

1. Reaffirm the District’s contractual obligation to retirees with lifetime benefits.
2. Adequately staff the Benefits Office—hire more people to do the work that cannot currently be done due to lack of staff.
3. Improve communication with retirees by sending information and updates; respond to questions (see #2 above).

However, we were relegated to public comment time because our request to be on the Board agenda as an item—Retiree Health Care, which would have enabled the Trustees to engage in a dialogue with us and to also take some action—was denied. During public comment the Trustees can only listen. It is a good time to say something

if you don’t want or expect anything to happen as a result of your presentation.

The District is taking some small steps towards rectifying the problems. They have told PRO that they plan to develop two part-time job positions in the Benefits Office. In fact, they are hoping some retirees may be interested in applying. We are awaiting job descriptions, qualifications, number of hours and whether the work is remote or in the office. The District has also shared a draft of a letter that gives retirees phone numbers and emails of health care plan resources, presumably to help retirees get questions answered. Perhaps by the time you read this newsletter the letters will have been sent and the two positions will be posted and advertised.

Finally, Dr. McKinley shared a draft of a reimbursement process that he had developed with District lawyers. Not only does the proposed process rely on a cumbersome set of steps for retirees to complete, but there is also no guarantee that a retiree would be reimbursed.

PRO has reached out to both PFT and SEIU to work with us. We would like to see our former unions present a reimbursement process to the District that fulfills the District’s contractual obligation to us and does not put the burden of being reimbursed on the retiree.

We will continue to show up at Board meetings, write letters, emails and make phone calls. Join us, stand with us. There is strength in numbers, so if your lifetime benefits are important to you, now is the time to speak up, do something. Do not hope someone else will protect your lifetime benefits—it is up to you now. ♦

Bruce’s Address

(Continued from page 4)

for non-generic drugs with no promise from the District of reimbursement.

I could go on and on. The point is this is not what we signed up for when we retired. The District and our unions signed contracts, which promised us that we would retain the benefits that were in place when we retired. In my case, that was the situation until January 1 of this year. I worked for the District for over 30 years. I was a faculty member, Laney Senate president, DAS vice-president, PFT President, and leader of a year-long planning project after the passage of the first bond issue. In those days we used to talk about the Peralta family. What I feel now is that the Peralta family has decided to treat the elderly as if we can be discarded. The way to show me that I am wrong is to immediately take steps to resolve these problems.

We must have a reimbursement system that is operational immediately. VC McKinley informed PRO leaders

at a meeting in February that the District was working with its lawyers to develop such a policy but that it would not be ready to put in place until July. In the interim he promised that reimbursements would be handled on a case-by-case basis. But the manager of the Benefits Office tells us he has never received any directive from the VC to set up a temporary reimbursement system. Many retirees cannot lay out money for prescriptions, hearing aids, and non-Medicare assignment providers. Many are hesitating to fill the prescriptions or to make appointments with their doctors.

We are here tonight because we want the Board to direct the Chancellor and the VC to make solving the problems retirees are having -- problems created by the change in benefits -- a priority. We want the Benefits Office staffed up, we want a policy that says any inquiry about the benefits changes will be responded to within a day or two, and most importantly we want a reimbursement system that starts immediately even if it is on a case-by-case basis and temporary. The District made a promise to us and that promise should be honored.

Thank you. ♦

Odell Johnson

(Continued from page 3)

When Johnson returned to St. Mary's he became the first administrator of color at the college, and a champion for SMC students of color. The non-renewal of Johnson's contract was misconstrued as a firing, and five African-American basketball players walked off the court in support of their beloved dean. They shut down the campus down for eight days. As a result of the student-led protests, the college hired a Black and a Latino administrator, and established many student success programs and academic services that still exist today.

I am grateful to have had the privilege of meeting this Oakland gem and being of service to him. And BTW, he is married to my beautiful Soror, Virginia. Happy Black History Month!

(To view Johnson's acceptance speech for his 2015 induction into the West Coast Conference Hall of Honor, which includes video of Johnson on the court and praise from his fellow player, Tom Meschery, go to YouTube and place the following link in the search box: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=03v_JGUcoy8)

Odell was also chosen for St. Mary's All Century Basketball Team. ♦

Debby's Address

(Continued from page 4)

rectify the problems created by the rushed transition.

This is also about your contractual obligation- a legally binding contract that the District has with all employees hired before July 1, 2004 to lifetime benefits as spelled out in the union contracts. It is about upholding those legal obligations. At least two Trustees, Trustee Gonzalez Yuen and Trustee Delfin Polk acknowledged the importance of that contractual obligation in October of 2022, and Vice Chancellor McKinley has repeatedly spoken of his belief that the District is obligated to "make retirees whole" as per our contracts at multiple public meetings.

We are pleased the District has taken tiny steps in the last few days to begin resolving some of the problems including sharing a sketch of a posting for two part time positions in the Benefits Office and a draft of letter giving contact information for health plan resources, yet no reimbursement information at all.

So, PRO will be back and continue to advocate for the needs and concerns of retirees, many of whom have given much of their lives to the Peralta Community College Dis-

trict. It saddens me to say that the treatment of some retirees has been shameful. This has not been a respectful way to treat the elder members of the PCCD family. Please do the right thing, prioritize the expenditures needed to reimburse retirees NOW and hire the sorely needed staff. And Trustees, be sure the District honors its contractual obligations.

Thank you. ♦

Contributions received for the PRO Scholarship Fund

From **Michael and Pamela Dennis**
In memory of Wylie Walthall

From **Michael and Barbara Wirth**
In memory of Wylie Walthall, Alice Marez and Ralph Marinaro

From **Kenneth Hurst**
In honor of PRO board

From **John Luther**
In memory of Wylie Walthall and Alice Marez

From **Shirley Fogarino**
General contribution

From **Sue Chin**
In memory of Bob Grill

From **Debbie Green**
In honor of the PRO Board

From **Helene Maxwell**
In honor of the PRO Board

In Memoriam

The following Peralta retiree has passed away. PRO extends our deepest condolences to his family and loved ones.

Bob Grill
Rip Talavera
Sandra Henry

**Yes, I want to support the PRO
Scholarship Fund with a contribution.**

(Please print)

- In honor of:**
 On the occasion of:
 In memory of:

Please send acknowledgement card to:

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Contributor:

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Make check payable to: **The Peralta Foundation—PRO**
 Send to: **PRO, 4200 Park Boulevard #605,
 Oakland, CA 94602**

*Contributions are tax deductible to the extent
 allowed by federal and state law.*

Be sure your PRO Membership is up-to-date

Please check the label on your newsletter to see if your PRO membership has expired. Now, more than ever, being a member of PRO is crucial. Peralta has made significant changes to retiree benefits. PRO is doing everything it can to minimize the negative effects of those changes on retirees and to keep retirees informed. Being a member of PRO supports that work. It also pays for the newsletter, the website and our ability to communicate with retirees.

Membership dues are:

\$20 One year, \$55 Three years, \$80 Five years, \$250 Lifetime. You can easily renew your membership either by mail or online.

MAIL

To renew by mail, send a check made out to "PRO" to:

PRO
 4200 Park Boulevard #605
 Oakland, CA 94602

ONLINE

To renew online go to the PRO website: www.peraltaretirees.org. In the green field on the right side of your screen scroll down to see a link which allows you to pay your dues by credit card through our PayPal account.

Peralta Retirees Organization
4200 Park Blvd, #605
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PRO Annual Picnic
 Details in next newsletter