

The **ADVOCATE**

The Voice Of Oklahoma's State Employees



Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Volume 28, No. 3

OPEA Members Have A Voice At Annual Lobby Day





MAKING A DIFFERENCE ...

New Members • The following people recently chose to get involved by joining the Oklahoma Public Employees Association.

Lora Baker
Lillian Barber
Jennifer Bradshaw
Debra Cole
Rhonda Collins
Shannon Combs
Catherine Diffin

Fran Ferrari
Michael Fina
Tresia Hamilton
Terrainia Harris
Barbara Henderson
Beatrice Hill
Wanda Holding

Jeffrey Hunter
Patricia Kelly
Connie Lawrence
Debbie McCowan
Tina Pendergraft
Kim Rayno
Anna Ring

Janice Sharp
Amani Smiley
Brandy Smith
Kathy Taylor
Linda Thomas
Kimberly Williams
Dianna Wilson

15-Year Anniversaries • These OPEA members reached their 15th anniversary with the Association during the past month.

Gina Adams
Nancy Adams
Beverly Bellar
Loren Bentley
Nauweeta Bledsoe
Jeffery Bridges
Michael Brown

Kevin Carpenter
Frances Daffin
Mary Edge
Melton Edminsten
Steven Feehan
Carl Green
Cathy Hollenback

Steve Howe
Vonya Lang
Brett Littlefield
Carl Long
Margaret Long
Lydia McBride
Kay Mitchell

Sharilynn Moore
Steve Myatt
David Orange
Brenda Regan
James Richard
John Roper
Ronny Sales

Pricilla Saunders
Jan Savage
Bryce Waugh
Dorothy Webb
Freda Wickware
Kim Williams
Irene Wresche



OPEA Members Only may call the OPEA office for ...

Executive Director: Sterling Zearley

Legal Advocacy Program: Melinda Alizadeh-Fard, General Counsel

Agency Information: Trish Frazier, Policy and Agency Relations Director

Grievance Assistance: Melinda Alizadeh-Fard, General Counsel

Political Action: Scott Barger, Deputy Director

Communications Information: Bud Elder, Communications Director

Legislation Information: Nancy Hughes, Executive Assistant

Schedule A Meeting: Dean Balmer, Membership Director

Chris Alsobrooks, Membership Representative

Tarajee Stevenson, Membership Representative

General Information: Raeshoun Jakes, Administrative Assistant

Joining OPEA: Nancy Hughes or Raeshoun Jakes

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The OPEA Mission Statement

OPEA unites public employees in Oklahoma to
improve the quality of state employment.

The OPEA Vision Statement

OPEA will be a catalyst to make Oklahoma
a better place to live and work.



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Directors from a majority of Oklahoma's largest state agencies met with OPEA Board members, leaders and staff during the Association's annual Agency Head Breakfast.

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The Advocate

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Ask What You Can Do For Your Legislator

On the afternoon OPEA served lunch to the House Minority Caucus, I was asked a question by a legislator that, unfortunately, I had been asked several times this session.

"Why do your members only call when they want something?"



Normally I would have stood up to a question like that, saying something like, "I'm sure we helped with your campaign," or "Haven't our members e-mailed or called your office, thanking you for your support of state employees?"

But I couldn't because I know it's a valid question.

Are we perceived at the Capitol as a group that contacts their legislators once a year or so, yelling about a pay raise? If indeed this is our current reputation, it needs to change and change now.

This organization was built on the grass-roots activities of our members. When I look at old editions of *The Advocate*, I see members making signs or knocking on doors or attending rallies for OPEA-endorsed candidates. I see our members and their legislators working together to make things right for state employees.

I see relationships built over time — relationships that would make any lawmaker work his or her tail off for those who have devoted time and energy toward common goals.

While we like to say that we are the "new" OPEA, one

Moore Comments

By Billy Moore • OPEA President

with a clearly defined, positive agenda for state employees, perhaps we should look back to our not-too-distant past and see how we attained major accomplishments. I know we were suc-

cessful because our members worked together as a team year in and year out and because our legislators knew that if they stuck their necks out for us, we would reciprocate. Can we honestly say that this is the case right here, right now?

Here's what I suggest: After the current session is over, call the legislator in your district, take him or her to the coffee shop and explain what it is you do for the state of Oklahoma. Invite your legislator to your worksite, show him or her that you are a frontline representative of the state of Oklahoma and, as such, deal with a myriad of challenges every day, such as below-market pay, inferior working conditions and short staffing. Then ask what you can do to help your legislator reach his or her goals.

Keep your Board member and OPEAPAC abreast of political happenings in your area. From these very small efforts, great success can be achieved.

And try this on for size: Ask not what your legislator can do for you, ask what you can do for your legislator.

The payoff will be in spades.

"I see our members and their legislators working together to make things right for state employees."

Taking The Time To Say Thanks

All too frequently here at OPEA, we don't take the time to stop and recognize those who have gone beyond the call of duty on behalf of state employees.

Frontlines

By Sterling Zearley
OPEA Executive Director



Last week, I had the pleasure of presenting former Oklahoma Senate President Pro Tempore Stratton Taylor the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Oklahoma Public Employees Association. This honor is long overdue. Taylor's door was always open to this Association and state employees because he knew the importance of our jobs to the people we serve.

Taylor, who began his career as a state representative in 1978, was elected to the Senate in 1982 and became president pro tempore in 1995.

Under Sen. Taylor's guidance, state employees received

numerous pay raises, including \$2,000 in 2000. In addition, the state employee benefit allowance was increased to include 50-percent coverage for dependent health insurance in 1998 and 75 percent three years later.

Taylor's dedication to state services and the people who provide them was not limited to the legislative arena. He joined with client family members and OPEA in opposing the privatization of the DHS facilities for the developmentally disabled by providing an amicus brief in the case before the Supreme Court. Throughout the years, he has been dedicated to quality services for veterans at the Claremore Veterans Center, supporting adequate capital and operations funding for the agency.

It would be great if all legislators followed the example of Stratton Taylor concerning state employee issues. He is truly one if a kind.

Congratulations, Sen. Taylor. You richly deserve this award.

Executive Order Establishes Study Of State Employee Pay



Gov. Brad Henry

From highway workers to correctional officers to state park employees to child welfare workers, members of the Oklahoma Public Employees Association celebrated Gov. Brad Henry's newly

signed executive order calling for a market compensation study to provide long-term direction for state employee pay.

"Today is a banner day for both state employees as a whole and our membership specifically," OPEA Executive Director Sterling Zearley said April 12. "This Association has campaigned for this study for many, many years and, thanks to the hard work of people both in the OPEA office and at the Capitol, it is now a reality."

According to OPEA Deputy Director Scott Barger, the idea of an executive order to create the panel was first broached by the governor and State Treasurer Scott Meacham.

"In one of our pre-session meetings with the governor and the treasurer, we hammered home the fact that state employees are currently paid at a rate that is some 11 percent below their market counterparts, and that, because of a lack of retention policies, this state is losing some \$80

million per year in employee turnover," he said. "It was then that both officials, longtime state employee supporters, began to formulate the concept that became a blueprint that should give state employees consistent, fair pay rais-

es, not unlike what our state teachers currently enjoy."

Responsibilities and duties of the task force will include:

- Review and analyze existing data and reports relating to state employees' direct compensation. Analysis should include the use of relevant market studies.

- Review state policies and practices relating to employee compensation.

- Identify positions that pose critical recruitment and retention concerns for the state.

- Review existing data and reports relating to state employee benefits and determine the feasibility of performing a benefit value study of state employee benefits.

- Develop strategies to assure that critical recruitment and retention issues are addressed and that state employee pay is competitive with the external market on an ongoing, long-term basis.

The panel will include representatives of the administrator of the Office of Personnel Management, the director of the Office of State Finance, the director of the Department of Human

Services, the director of the Department of Corrections, the executive director of the largest organization representing state employees and four senior level executives from the private sector, one of which will be designated by the governor to serve as chair of the task force.

"OPEA members should be thrilled that their Association has a seat at this table," Zearley said. "They should also be excited that the committee will

include members of the private sector, a group that may not be familiar with the critical services performed every day by state employees."

Barger cautioned that creating the task force was like climbing Mount Everest and that it is just the beginning of a process in which all state employees will need to become involved.

"By creating a deadline of Jan. 1, 2008, for the findings of the committee, Gov.

"They should also be excited that the committee will include members of the private sector, a group that may not be familiar with the critical services performed every day by state employees."

– OPEA Executive Director Sterling Zearley

Henry has given us plenty of time to educate our members, our lawmakers and the general public about its goals and missions,"

he said. "For this review board to change the perception of state employee pay, we will need a strong grass-roots effort to see that its recommendations are implemented and fully funded."

Barger cautioned that while the creation of the task force marks a historic win for state employees, the fight has just begun.

"We are about to embark on a long process toward fair market pay for state employees," he said. "OPEA members are going to have to become active advocates of this issue, educating both their fellow employees and their legislators about this task force and its recommendations. The only way we get to our goal is if we are united in our efforts."

"We cannot thank the governor enough for taking this stance toward the betterment of state employee pay," Zearley said. "It would also be appropriate to thank Treasurer Meacham, Office of State Finance Director Tony Hutchison and Oscar Jackson, administrator of the Office of Personnel Management, for their concerns regarding the betterment of state employees."

"By creating a deadline of Jan. 1, 2008, for the findings of the committee, Gov. Henry has given us plenty of time to educate our members, our lawmakers and the general public about its goals and missions."

– OPEA Deputy Director Scott Barger

OPEA Seeks Common Ground With House Democrats

"It's not much fun when the rabbit has the gun."

That phrase, uttered by State Rep. R.C. Pruett, D-Antlers, might have perfectly fit the situation at the Capitol when



OPEA Executive Director Sterling Zearley talks with members of the House Democratic Caucus.

House Democrats stood fast in their effort to block attempts by the majority party to override Gov. Brad Henry's veto of the 2008 budget package.

The Oklahoma Public Employees Association served lunch to the House Democratic Caucus April 8 and shared its

vision of a successful legislative session with 44 members of the minority party.

"What a great opportunity," said OPEA Executive Director Sterling Zearley. "This is a very interesting time at the Capitol. Like OPEA, these Democrats were left out of the original budget negotiations, so we decided to sit down with them to

find some common ground."

The meeting included a presentation by Zearley that highlighted OPEA's \$2,500 pay raise proposal as well as other items on the Association's Legislative Agenda.

"Now that the budget process is starting over, we feel there is no such thing as 'off the table,'" Zearley said. "So we intend to keep hammering our message home to these legislators."

OPEA President Billy Moore attended the event and was impressed that legislators were willing to work with OPEA.

"Many in this group got here because of our election work in the field," he said. "They all seemed very supportive and asked intelligent questions about our proposed legislation."

In the spirit of bipartisanship, OPEA plans to hold a similar meeting with House Republicans.



OPEA Executive Director Sterling Zearley, left, and Deputy Director Scott Barger discuss issues with members of the House Democratic Caucus.

DHS Paying The Price Of Privatization

Oklahoma's Department of Human Services is paying the price of private contracting. The non-profit vendor that administers ADvantage waiver services was overpaid by hundreds of thousands of dollars, according to a recent article in the *Tulsa World*.

"This is yet another example of the great value of state employees. The ADvantage waiver has continued to grow exponentially compared to the dedicated DHS workers who provide the service."
— OPEA Policy and Research Director Trish Frazier

which could be used for services," said OPEA Policy and Research Director Trish Frazier, "and another argument for keeping public services in state agencies, which are more accountable and transparent in spending taxpayer dollars."

DHS pays the authority \$5 million to administer the state's ADvantage waiver services.

According to the *World* report, the director of the private organization received \$158,000 in FY 2006, including more than \$60,000 in bonuses. Sixteen of the authority's 69 employees received \$60,000 or more in salary, bonuses and incentive pay. Seven employees received more than \$10,000 in

bonuses.

Frazier said other potential abuses show a complete lack of regard for public funds.

"One employee for this group worked from Missouri and spent only six days a month in Oklahoma. The authority paid \$7,000 in hotel, airfare, rental cars and Internet service for the employee, in addition to \$83,000 in salary and bonuses. The DHS audit of the organization's travel expenses showed insufficient documentation," she said.

Reports from the *World* say that DHS refused to sign the authority's contract in 2004 until salaries were reduced to the level of the market.

"Unfortunately, state leaders believe contracting with non-profit organizations will keep vendors from lining their pockets with taxpayer funds," said Frazier. "This is yet another example of the great value of state employees. The ADvantage waiver has continued to grow exponentially compared to the dedicated DHS workers who provide the service. In addition, most DHS employees who work with the Medicaid and ADvantage programs are woefully underpaid, which is embarrassing when compared with the salaries of this private vendor."

"If these accusations are proved, this is yet another example of private contractors blatantly wasting funds which could be used for services."
— OPEA Policy and Research Director Trish Frazier

OPEA Members Have A Voice At Annual Lobby Day

Armed with a myriad of issues to discuss, members of the Oklahoma Public Employees Association descended on the state Capitol during the Association's annual Lobby Day April 24.

"We are a very active Association with major issues regarding the betterment of state government," said OPEA Executive Director Sterling Zearley. "We find that legislators are very receptive to OPEA because they know we are very active citizens in our communities who see close up the problems in state government."

"We need to give you everything you need to do your jobs for the people of Oklahoma. You are on the front line."

— House Speaker
Lance Cargill

For this year's Lobby Day, OPEA members unified under the Association's Legislative Agenda, which includes a \$2,500 across-the-board pay raise, a 2-percent cost-of-living adjustment for OPERS retirees and a \$100 per month increase in the OPERS health insurance subsidy and calls for all state employee salaries to remain above the poverty level, reinstating the rights and severance benefits of unclassified state employees during a reduction-in-force, and a program that would allow state agencies to pay the cost of education loans for their employees.

All About The Veto

After a welcoming session, the group was addressed by state Treasurer Scott Meacham, who explained Gov. Brad Henry's veto of the recently passed legislative budget.

"Gov. Henry felt that the budget was lacking in many aspects, including the woeful underfunding of the Corrections Department, as well as several other

agencies," he said. "All we have wanted was an opportunity for all groups to get together and hammer out what's best for Oklahoma."

Meacham, who predicted there would be a break in the budget impasse soon, was praised for his continued work on behalf of state employees by Zearley, who led the round of applause for the Treasurer's most recent initiative, the market pay study recently established by the governor's executive order.

"Treasurer Meacham has been with us right down the line on this issue, which could lead to a brighter day regarding state employee pay," he said.

A Word From The Speaker

Next up on the dais were House Speaker Lance Cargill and Appropriations Committee Chair Chris Bengé.

"As we enter the 21st century, we need to make government more modern and more responsive to the taxpayers," Cargill said. "And, as we streamline government, we may have to ask state employees to do more. With that in mind, we must pay them appropriately."

Cargill continued, "We need to give you everything you need to do your jobs for the people of Oklahoma. You are on the front line. We have to rely on you to tell us what it is you need."

Cargill also mentioned that state employment runs in his family.

"My mother works for the state Tax Commission, so I hear all about state employee needs," he said.

Bengé discussed the current budget issue.

"I have every indication that the budget situation will be worked out," he said. "We need for this to happen so that our government does not shut down."



The Wright Stuff

"Your work in service to our state should make you very proud," the next speaker, Rep. John Wright, the principal author of the OPEA retiree COLA bill, told his audience. "And I feel that, as state employee leaders, you should carry the standard to our other public employees. OPEA is a great organization to help showcase the hard work that you do."

Wright also commented on the state of Oklahoma's retirement systems.

"We all know that our state retirement systems are underfunded and that something must be done to make sure we honor commitments to both current and future retirees who rely on this benefit," he said. "One of my ideas is to depoliticize the issue of treating all retirement systems the same. They should be allowed to operate independently, and, if the assumptions indicate that the systems can pay benefits to the retirees, they should be able to have them without election-year strings."

Some OPEA members also visited their representatives and senators, while others took part in a retirement-system seminar.

"This was a great day for state employees," Zearley said. "Our legislators got to see the faces of OPEA and that the members for which we work every day at the Capitol are intelligent and engaged public servants who have the best interests of Oklahoma at heart."

Lobby Day 2007

April 24 • Oklahoma State Capitol



State Treasurer Scott Meacham was the first speaker.

Craig Mahl and Merle McKaskle listen to Lobby Day speakers.



Above: House Speaker Lance Cargill addresses Lobby Day participants as OPEA Deputy Director Scott Barger looks on. Right: Barger welcomes House Minority Leader Danny Morgan.



OSEGIB Director Bill Crain addresses the crowd.



OPEA Board Member Jan Ens and retiree Lynne Bussell.



Heath Wallace, right, and a group from the L.E. Rader Center sign in.



Rep. Chris Bengt talks with Granvel Tomlin.



Left: OPEAPAC Board member Bob Zapffe was among those in attendance at Lobby Day. Right: Bill Malone and Esther Thompson speak with Sen. Debbe Leftwich.



Lobby Day 2007

April 24 • Oklahoma State Capitol



Rep. Shane Jett discusses issues with Wally Ogunoiki.



Janis Tidwell listens to one of the speakers.



Sen. Jim Wilson talks with Tourism employees Mary Mays, OPEA Board member Connie Stockton and Linda Crain.



Rep. Al Lindley talks with OPEA Board member Dixie Jackson and Tim Creedon.



Frank Morris, seated, was among the Lobby Day participants.



Rep. John Wright concentrated on retiree issues.



Rep. Doug Cox talks with a delegation from the Delaware County DHS office.



OPEA Board member Forrest Rush, center, and members from the Oklahoma Department of Transportation.



House Minority Leader Danny Morgan addressed the Lobby Day crowd.



Left: OPEA Executive Director Sterling Zearley talks with State Treasurer Scott Meacham. Right: Retiree Mike McComber discusses state employee issues with Zearley.



Members Helping Members

State Employees Need Shared Leave

Many members have contacted the Association for help since OPEA passed legislation establishing a shared leave program for state employees. Two currently are in desperate need of help from their fellow OPEA members.

In most cases, members need donated leave to make ends meet due to circumstances beyond their control. In the past, for example, OPEA members have stepped up to the plate to help fellow state employees who have had to stay home with a spouse diagnosed with terminal cancer.

Two OPEA members are in need of immediate help in the form of shared leave. A Department of Corrections employee must have surgery because of a workers' comp injury. A secretary, she was taken hostage by an inmate and later fell and was injured at work. When her leave runs out, she will lose her regular paycheck for an extended period of time while she recovers from surgery.

Another OPEA member, a Department of Health employee, faces surgery and does not have enough leave remaining to cover the time she will have to be away from her job.

These are just two of many instances where OPEA members have turned to the Association to help them through a tough situation. Unfortunately, OPEA currently has no donors available to provide relief for these two members.

If you or someone you know has extra leave time that could help another member, please contact Nancy Hughes at the OPEA office to make arrangements to donate leave.

Attention All Retirees!

*Retiree Council Meeting
June 15, 2007
10 a.m.*

*OPEA Headquarters
13 N.E. 28th St.
Oklahoma City, OK 73105*

This is a critical meeting to discuss the retiree section of the Platform for the 2008 legislative session. For more information, call or e-mail Trish Frazier:

(405) 524-6764

(800) 880-6732

trishf@opea.org

Did you know that Oklahoma Public Employees could save up to \$327.96 or more a year on auto insurance?



You may already know that Oklahoma Public Employees can get a special group discount on auto insurance through Liberty Mutual's Group Savings Plus® program.* But did you know that Group Savings Plus offers many other discounts on both auto and home insurance? In fact, you could save up to \$327.96 or more a year on auto insurance alone.** And you could save even more by insuring your home as well.

To learn more about all the valuable savings and benefits available through Group Savings Plus, call today.

Call **1-800-225-8281** for the Liberty Mutual office nearest you or visit **www.libertymutual.com/lm/opea**.

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Apathy Can Be A Dangerous Attitude

"First they came for the socialists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a socialist.

"Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist.

"Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew.

"Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak up for me."

This is but one version of the poem "First they came. ..." by Rev. Martin Niemoller that describes the dangers of political apathy or indifference.



This poem came to my mind during a recent OPEA staff meeting, where the main topic of discussion was one always on the minds of public employees: privatization.

The term "privatization" has generally been defined as any process aimed at shifting functions and responsibilities, in whole or in part, from government to the private sector. In 2003, Gov. Brad Henry signed into law the amendments to the Privatization of State Functions Act" (Oklahoma State Statutes Title 74, Chapter 19, Sections 588 and 589). This law requires state employees to be notified of plans to privatize their job functions and to be given the opportunity to submit a bid for providing the services that the state no longer wants to provide.

Recently, the Tourism and Recreation Department sold or leased state parks to private developers, thus eliminating positions state employees have held for many years. We also witnessed attempts by the Oklahoma Military Department to eliminate police officers and replace them with security guards.

OPEA fights these actions, not because we have a large number of members who will be affected but because these actions set a bad precedent and go against our mission statement to improve the lives of Oklahoma's public employees.

While on the surface it may look like these new private sector jobs pay more, these positions do not include the benefits this Association has worked so hard to maintain. Health, life and disability insurance are gone, along with retirement benefits, due process and a sense of job security.

Those who believe that privatization saves money are somewhat shortsighted. We can argue that, in the long run, privatization is a financial drain on the state because, among other things, it increases the ranks of the uninsured. I could go on about how vulnerable the uninsured are; how most bankruptcies are the result of unexpected medical costs; how the uninsured too often must rely on the emergency room because they cannot afford treatment for minor health problems before they develop into serious illnesses; how the elderly cannot survive on Social Security. I'm sure you see the point I'm trying to make.

When we suspect that agencies have not complied with the Privatization Act, we must fight the proposed action. As an association, we have strength in numbers. Our members should rally around the affected employees, and know as we band together that "There, but for the grace of God, go I."

If you suspect that an agency function you or another state employee performs is in the process of being contracted out, please contact us so that we may work with you to make sure you are aware of your rights.

Burden Of Proof
By Melinda Alizadeh-Fard
OPEA General Counsel

Cash Out With OPEA!

The Oklahoma Public Employees Association's top March recruiters and the cash they earned by bringing new members into the Association:

Recruiter	Number of Applications	Amount Earned	Recruiter	Number of Applications	Amount Earned
Phyllis Adams	1	\$5	Verna Meadows	1	\$5
Matthew Budder	1	\$5	Brian Nickels	2	\$10
Jill Gawf	1	\$5	Wally Ogunoiki	3	\$15
Nancy Gram	1	\$5	Faye Owens	5	\$25
Glen Hager	1	\$5	Anthony Parsons	1	\$5
Glenn Hightower	1	\$5	Andera Perkins	1	\$5
Jerald Knight	12	\$70	Mike Price	1	\$5
Randall Lopez	1	\$5	Regina Wilson	1	\$5
Don McDaniel	5	\$25			



OPEA Leaders, State Agency Directors Interact At Association's Annual Breakfast

Directors from a majority of Oklahoma's largest state agencies met with Oklahoma Public Employees Association Board members, leaders and staff during the Association's annual



Oklahoma Department of Corrections Director Justin Jones, right, visits with OPEA members William Weldon, Mike Rogers, Glen Coleman and Darren Francis during the Agency Head Breakfast.

Agency Head Breakfast April 9.

"Because this was my first meeting with many of these agency directors, I was interested to see their take on OPEA," said Association Executive Director Sterling Zearley.

Zearley began the program with a heartfelt pledge of cooperation with the

agencies for the betterment of their employees and OPEA members.

"OPEA wants what you want when it comes to keeping the best and the brightest employees at your agencies," he said.

Zearley also mentioned the serious turnover rates throughout state government.

"Turnover in this state costs some \$80 million per year," he said. "If we could even save half of those funds, they could be used for a 2.5-percent pay raise each year for state employees."

Zearley promised that OPEA will be agency-friendly. He said he wanted the directors to know that the Association is available to help in any situation that affects state employees.

"My door will always be open to you. Use us to help yourselves create better employee morale," he said.

OPEA Deputy Director Scott Barger followed Zearley to the lectern to discuss the Association's market compensation study, which was recently created through an executive order from Gov. Brad Henry.

"Right now our state employees are, by and large, paid 11 percent below people in the private sector performing the same job functions," he said. "What we asked for was a task force to study this issue and make appropriate recommendations to the Legislature."

Barger said creating the committee and implementing the plan will be like climbing Mount Everest.

"We have a long way to go to make this a reality," he said. "But I would think that because any plan would fully fund personnel in state agencies, you would support our efforts."

OPEA President Billy Moore was pleased with the morning's outcome.

"It was great to see our Board members interacting with

their own agency heads," he said. "There was a great turnout and we all look forward to the next opportunity to meet with these fine state leaders and find common ground."

Among those attending the breakfast were: Terri White, Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services; Bill Crain, OSEEGIB; Michael Crutcher, Department of Health; Martha Spear, Department of Veterans Affairs; Susan Bussey, Merit Protection Commission; Oscar Jackson, Shirley Russell and Hank Batty, Office of Personnel Management; Susan McVey, Department of Libraries; Tony Hutchison, Office of State Finance; Mary Howell, Department of Rehabilitative Services; Phil Kraft, Employees Benefits Council; Gary Ridley, Department of Transportation; Tom Spencer, OPERS; Justin Jones, Department of Corrections; J.D. Daniels, Pardon and Parole Board; and Terry Peach, Department of Agriculture.



DHS Director Howard Hendrick, left, and newly-appointed Office of State Finance Director Tony Hutchison at OPEA's Agency Head Breakfast.

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Longtime OPEA Member Will Lead ODMHSAS

Longtime state employee and OPEA member Terri White was recently named commissioner of the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, after serving in a myriad of positions throughout the agency.

Most recently the director of communications and public policy for the agency, White has also served as the interim director of the Tulsa Center for Behavioral Health's Co-Occurring Unit and was interim executive director for the Central Oklahoma Community Mental Health Center.

White wasted no time in discussing some of the challenges she faces in her new role.

"In Oklahoma, what we do is incarcerate people for these diseases in a state system where two thirds of people with mental illness go without treatment. Jail has become the new home for the mentally ill," she said.

She also mentioned that Oklahoma has the highest rate of severe mental illness in the nation.

"The state wastes \$3.2 billion per year in direct costs (jail, emergency room visits, child welfare) because it doesn't provide treatment to those with mental health and substance abuse problems," she commented.

According to White, her administration will have several areas of focus.

"We will always concentrate on early intervention and prevention services for

mental illness and substance abuse and will ensure that every Oklahoman in need has the opportunity to recover from mental illness or addiction," she said.

According to White, she will rely on her staff to help get the agency's message across.

"Everyone who works for ODMHSAS will have to be advocates to help dispel the stigma that surrounds those

with mental illness and substance abuse issues," she said.

"I just really believe that Oklahoma can be the first state in the nation where everyone who has mental illness can recover," she added.

OPEA Board member Dixie Jackson, council representative for the agency, said White's appointment was highly supported.

"Terri has worked in a myriad of positions throughout ODMHSAS, knows our functions inside and out and has the support of our staff," she said.

Jackson noted that White is a proud member of OPEA.

"I signed Terri up as a member many years ago, and she has continued to be an active member of our organization," she said.

White is excited about her positive relationship with OPEA.

"I want this agency to make sure that it has a solid working relationship with OPEA. We have a lot of needs and OPEA can always help," she said.

As one of the state's largest agencies, the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services has an annual budget of \$286 million and more than 2,100 employees.



Terri White, left, commissioner of the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, and OPEA Board member Dixie Jackson, an ODMHSAS employee.

OPEA's 'Breakroom' Is On The Air

Don't touch that dial ... er ... mouse.

OPEA is using cutting-edge technology to inform, educate and amuse its members.

Hosted by OPEA Deputy Director Scott Barger and Communications Director Bud Elder, the podcast known as "The Breakroom" is currently offering the latest in news, some with a humorous bent, from OPEA's perspective, as well as interviews with politicians, activists, state workers and celebrities.

Barger and Elder are lifelong friends who are both former Purcell Dragons, both married to active state employees and who between them have about 50 years of state service.

"These two go at it in a friendly way pretty much all day long here in the office," said OPEA Executive Director Sterling Zearley. "They both have extraordinary knowledge of governmental issues, plus a strong desire to see a strong and informed OPEA membership."

Listeners can catch "The Breakroom" each week by logging in at www.podcast.opea.org.



On-air personalities Scott Barger, Bud Elder and Sterling Zearley.

You Can Go Home Again

New OPEA Executive Director Makes First Official Visit In Poteau

Whoever said you can't go home again has never met newly-appointed OPEA Executive Director Sterling Zearley who, in his first official visit since taking office, traveled to his hometown of Poteau to meet with members and friends.

"For my first meeting with the OPEA membership, I wanted to visit Poteau, the town in which I was raised," he said. "I know well the DHS office there and know we have some very hard-working members working out of that building."

Helping to celebrate Zearley's arrival were State Rep. Neil Brannon, State Sen. Kenneth Corn, OPEA staffers Scott Barger, Dean Balmer and Bud Elder and other friends and relatives.

Zearley said it was important in his first meeting to lay out his agenda for the Association.

"I want everyone to know this is a new day at OPEA," he said. "A day when I and my staff serve our members in order to get their workplace and pocket-book issues in front of decision-makers."

Zearley also said it was a new day

politically for OPEA.

"We are now a bipartisan organization, one that will look at each issue individually and not from the standpoint of one political party or another," he commented.

Brannon said he was pleased with Zearley's appointment.

"I've known Sterling for many years and have seen the dedication and spirit he will bring to OPEA," he said. "This Association has

taken a hit in both the press and at the Capitol, so it was important to select a leader who will right the ship as OPEA becomes, once again, the significant force it should be."

"I have had serious issues with some previous members of the OPEA staff," Corn said. "But now that I see that Sterling is going to instigate an open-door policy, I feel very comfortable in discussing any and all state employee issues with OPEA."

Both legislators commented on the need for OPEA.

"Not every one of you can be at the

Capitol every day to fight for your needs. I see someone from OPEA almost every day and know when they come in my door they have the best interests of their members at heart," Brannon said.

Zearley told the group that it will be a major initiative of his office to see that the public becomes aware of just how important state employees are to Oklahoma.

"One common problem that I have noticed is that it is very hard to define what a state employee does," he said. "This summer we are going to tour this great state, border to border, with an awareness program aimed at letting the public know just how critical state services are, whether it's

people who test your water, people who guard your prisons or people who look after abandoned children."

OPEA member Michelle Davis, who coordinated the meeting, was pleased with its outcome.

"Sterling brings a wonderful new vision to OPEA and, after his talk today, I know that both our members and non-members were inspired," she said.



OPEA Executive Director Sterling Zearley addresses the crowd at the Poteau DHS office.

"This Association has taken a hit in both the press and at the Capitol, so it was important to select a leader who will right the ship as OPEA becomes, once again, the significant force it should be."

– State Rep. Neil Brannon

Picture Perfect



Left: Executive Director Sterling Zearley, Membership Director Dean Balmer and Austin Zearley show off OPEA's new sign.



Left: Pat Kelly was among participants when OPEA Membership Director Dean Balmer, below left, made a presentation to Department of Health employees in Oklahoma City. Below: New OPEA Membership Representatives Chris Alsobrooks, left, and Tarajee Stevenson, second from right, met with Lt. Gov. Jari Askins and Rep. Joe Dorman at a recent Dorman fundraiser.



OPEA, Credit Union Help Member Survive Payroll Pinch

A long winter combined with a somewhat inflexible state payroll system can leave many OPEA members out in the cold.

"With the cold and flu season coming to a close, state employees may be running low on sick leave and unable to maintain the leave balance necessary to stay on their agency's first payroll," said OPEA Policy and Research Director Trish Frazier.

According to Frazier, the OPEA office often hears from employees who have been forced on to supplemental payroll and are facing a pile of bills and a late paycheck.

A recent situation with an OPEA member, which offered a perfect example of this dilemma, was resolved with the cooperation of the Oklahoma Employees Credit Union, specifically loan officer Flossie Russell, a longtime friend of state employees.

"An OPEA member who suffers from asthma recently called the OPEA office concerned that her automatic bill payments would overdraw her account and leave her with no money to pay expenses to attend a mandatory training at the first of the month," Frazier said. "Also, by the time her supplemental check arrives, she could already be faced with late charges and overdraft fees."

OPEA called Russell at OECU to request a gap loan,

which was granted.

"Even though our worker was not a credit union member, Flossie provided her with enough money to survive until she received her paycheck," Frazier said.

"You can probably imagine the relief I'm feeling," the

OPEA member wrote in an e-mail to Frazier. "This time yesterday my life felt very much out of control. Thank you again for the work and sincere support you put into resolving my situation. I will even more fervently recommend OPEA to state employees."

"The most rewarding part of my job is hearing from members who have had their issues resolved," said Frazier. "I know the dedication of OPEA members to the people they serve. Problems like this can put debilitating stress on state employees and their families."

"State employees who have not joined the credit union might want to consider becoming a member," Frazier concluded. "They have been a longtime partner with OPEA and can be very helpful in an emergency."

OECU can be reached at (405) 606-OECU or on the Web at www.oecu.org.

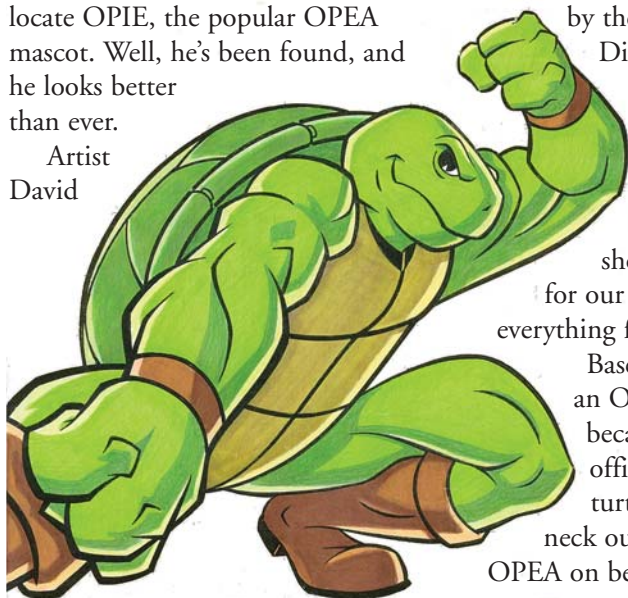


OPEA's Trish Frazier, left, and Flossie Russell of the Oklahoma Employees Credit Union.

OPIE Is Looking Better Than Ever

In a recent issue of *The Advocate*, we asked our members to help us locate OPIE, the popular OPEA mascot. Well, he's been found, and he looks better than ever.

Artist
David



Colclasure created the all-new OPIE, which has been officially recognized by the OPEA Board of Directors.

"We have great plans for our OPIE," said OPEA Executive Director Sterling Zearley. "Members should be on the lookout for our friend as he appears in everything from comics to clothing."

Based on a suggestion from an OPEA member, OPIE became the Association's official mascot because a turtle continually sticks its neck out, an effort mirrored by OPEA on behalf of its members.

Dates To Remember

(All dates are subject to change.)

May 2007

- 7-13 Public Service Recognition Week.
- 19 Board meeting • OPEA office.
- 25 Legislative session ends.
- 28 Memorial Day holiday • OPEA office closed.

June 2007

- 9 Board meeting • McAlester.

July 2007

- 4 4th of July • OPEA office closed.
- 14 Board meeting • Tulsa.

August 2007

- 19 Reserved for OPEA Annual Business Meeting • Bylaws if necessary.

September 2007

- 3 Labor Day holiday • OPEA office closed.
- 22 Board meeting • Enid.

October 2007

- 20 Board meeting • Norman.

November 2007

- 12 Veterans Day holiday • OPEA office closed.
- 16-17 OPEA Board retreat/meeting • First tentative date.
- 22-23 Thanksgiving Day holiday • OPEA office closed.

December 2007

- 14-15 Board retreat/meeting • Second tentative date.
- 24-25 Christmas holiday • OPEA office closed.

Don't Throw Money Away

This is your last chance to put money in your pocket by helping OPEA recruit 500 new members during your Association's Cash Out Recruitment Drive. It's all over at the end of June.



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Agency _____ Work Location _____ Position _____
Work Location Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Work Fax Number () _____ Who introduced you to OPEA? _____

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OPEA's standard dues are \$15 per month. Annual dues: state employees - \$180; retirees - \$60; associates - \$20; corporate affiliates - \$300. Contributions or gifts to OPEA are not deductible as charitable contributions for federal income tax purposes. However, dues payments are deductible as a miscellaneous itemized deduction. Dues include your annual subscription to *The Advocate* (a \$4 value). Your \$15 monthly dues payment includes a \$2.25 contribution to OSEAPAC.

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