President’s Report
By Andy Small, NIUAA President

Hello, my fellow annuitants:
As I sit here on a beautiful fall day looking out at the sunshine and the brilliant fall colors, I am grateful. I’m grateful for all that we have and with the hope that things will continue to improve for all of us.

For those who don’t know me, I retired from NIU in 2018 after 30 years in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry. I spent most of that time in the NIU shared governance system on the Operating Staff Council and numerous other committees. I spent my last years working with the State University Civil Service System chairing the Employee Advisory Committee for the state system. Now I have the honor of leading the NIU Annuitants Association. You might say that I worked for current employees while I was employed and now, I am working for retired employees since I am retired.

I want to let everyone know that even though Covid restrictions have changed the way the organization operates, Covid has not stopped the Board from getting things done. We have updated the by-laws to conform with recent changes at the state level. We have improved the NIUAA website to provide a more professional look and to include more information for our members. We have reinvested the organization’s funds, and we are on very solid financial ground. We have inaugurated a scholarship program and are working on increasing both the number and amount of the scholarships. And, by the way, this scholarship program is now fully endowed with the NIU Foundation, the only scholarship program of this type in the state!

Probably the best news is that in recent conversations with our local legislators there seem to be no matters in Springfield that would affect our members in the foreseeable future. Legislators believe that if there is any movement it would be to tax the pensions but not to diminish them, and this would not be addressed until at least 2024. Moreover, our legislators expressed their appreciation for the work of SUAA and the informational groundwork provided by its director Linda Brookhart. Other good news is that our current membership stands at 1622 members, second only to UIUC.

As we go forward in this changed world, we will continue to strive to provide opportunities for social interaction for our members, such as the renewal of social gatherings like the one at Fatty’s last month, and to advocate for the benefit of the organization. On behalf of the Board, we send our best regards to all members.

Andy Small,
NIUAA President

Legislative Report
By Jim Lockard, Legislative Committee

Springfield has been mostly quiet since my last Legislative Report. The normal Fall Veto Session began on Oct 19, with nothing to report as of the time of writing here. There have been no significant actions by the General Assembly (GA) that affect NIUAA members, and according to our legislators there should be none for the next year or two. One reason for this might be the improved fiscal situation in Illinois. As I reported in the summer, the state of Illinois got good news when the Fitch ratings agency revised its outlook from Negative to Positive, which has the potential to help the state by reducing borrowing costs. According to Fitch:

The Outlook Revision to Positive from Negative, reflects Illinois' preservation of fiscal resilience given the quick and sustained economic recovery since the start of the pandemic, coupled with the state's unwinding of certain nonrecurring fiscal measures. Recent fiscal results and the enacted fiscal 2022 budget suggest further improvements in operating performance and structural balance in the near and medium-term that could support a return to the pre-pandemic rating or higher.

(Continued on next page)
The NIU Annuitant

November 2021

Here is an external view that Illinois is at least headed in the right direction. The entire article is available at: Fitch Revises State of Illinois’ Rating Outlook to Positive; Affirms IDR at ‘BBB’ (fitchratings.com).

One of the most important items that will have been completed by the time you read this is redistricting following the 2020 Census. As you surely know, Illinois will lose one seat in the House of Representatives (down from 18 to 17) as a result, not of declining population as often predicted, but because of lack of growth in population compared to other states, primarily in the Sun Belt. While there will be much talk of the evils of gerrymandering, you can expect that those in power in Springfield will do everything possible to maintain, even increase their hold on state government and in DC. It’s hardly news, as it happens every 10 years in nearly all states. Still, the new district boundaries could have an impact on you, depending on where you live. Keep an eye on the changes when they become final. A Federal court invalidated a new map drawn in June and will be looking at another drawn in September.

Release of Census data was much delayed, causing many states to scramble to draw new district maps. Presumably that is a major reason that the 2022 Illinois primary will not be held until June 28. Please use the extra time to become better informed about current office holders and candidates under the new district map.

If you know of the Health Care Right of Conscience Act (HCRCA), you are part of a small minority. Enacted in 1998, this law was intended to enable some healthcare providers to decline to provide reproductive health services. In the era of COVID, it is being used to justify refusal to take the COVID vaccine. The GA is reconsidering the Act during the Veto Session.

October 15 to November 15 is the annual Medicare open enrollment period for 2021 with the plan year to begin January 1, 2022. If you are eligible for such coverage, you should have received several pieces of mail regarding the TRAIL program. As in past years, if you are satisfied with your current healthcare coverage, do nothing and your current plan will continue. You only need to take action if you wish to make a change, including to dental and dependent coverage. For more information, visit https://mybenefits.illinois.gov/ and select the State Employees Group Insurance Program on the left. In the interest of keeping you informed, I will continue to share the kinds of information provided above and will watch closely for any pension attacks that seem to be gaining traction. If you are not receiving my periodic Google Groups emails with the most timely information, please send me a request (jLockard9@gmail.com) and I’ll add you to my special email list. We must be prepared to support measures that will be helpful to the state and the pension systems and to fight against proposals that would harm the future well-being of public employees broadly.

Jim Lockard
Legislative Committee

The NIU Annuitant

November 2021

Association Scholarship Fund
By Clair Williams, Chair Scholarship Committee
Since the NIU Annuitants Association Scholarship Fund was established and funded as an endowment with the NIU Foundation on April 1, 2019 six scholarships have been awarded totaling $9,075.

The recipients of the scholarships were:

- Ariana Powell, College of Business, 2019-2020
- Kristen Miller, College of Education, 2020-2021
- Jeremy Levine, College of Business, 2021-2022
- Jack Holston, College of Education, 2021-2022
- Dat Nguyen, College of Engineering & Engineering Technology, 2021-2022
- Parker Smith, College of Engineering & Engineering Technology, 2021-2022

Funding of $3,075 has been secured for two scholarships to be offered for the academic year 2022-2023. The number and amount of future scholarships will be dependent on endowment earnings and future gifts.

Donations to the Scholarship Fund can be made using the Gift Form found at https://www.niu.edu/annuitants/_pdf/annuitantassociation-scholarship-donate-form.pdf

University Benefits Committee
By Terry Berg, Chair, Benefits Committee
The October 7, 2021, University Benefits Committee (UBC) focused on a conversation with Bill Hodson, Senior Associate Vice President, Human Resource Service. The conversation focused on two questions:

1. What is a benefit vs. terms and conditions of employment?
2. Do we have the right people at the table to discuss UBC issues?

In discussing the above questions, the conversation weaved the topics of remote working, staff attrition, staff retention, salary disparities, civil service employment rules, and market competition. Bill is very open to thinking outside the box and questioning the status quo, as it relates to recruitment and retention of staff and students.

Bereavement and Parental Leave policies will be discussed at the November meeting.

The following items from the 9/2/21 University Benefits Committee were discussed:
1. Family First Benefits have been extended through 11/30/21. Extension beyond that date is uncertain. This benefit includes time off for vaccine acquisition, quarantine and isolation.
2. A new deferred compensation plan 457 is being offered in addition to the current 403B. The 457 Plan is being managed by Voya. There are no matching funds in the plan. The plan began on 9/1, with deductions beginning in October.
3. HR is in transition due to retirements.
4. UBC will be examining bereavement and parental benefits equity as compared to other Illinois public and MAC institutions.
5. Flu shot information can be found at: https://www.niu.edu/employee-assistance/wellness/flu-shots.shtml

The clinics will be held in Holmes Student Center, Duke Ellington Ballroom on Wednesday, Sept. 22 and Tuesday, Oct. 12, 2021 10 AM – 4 PM.

6. To promote NIUAA membership, the UBC encourages NIUAA to place information in NIU Announcements.
The SUAA Foundation Report

By Steven Cunningham, Board Member

The SUAA Fall Meeting, often referred to as the “House of Delegates,” is scheduled for November 17 at the ISU Alumni Center. This year’s meeting is organized in a hybrid format, providing for both in-person and Zoom options for participation, with in-person participants following Illinois and ISU COVID-related requirements. SUAA finances are stable, and the organization is preparing for an active legislative environment as the 2023 election cycle approaches. The annual SUAA Legislative Platform will be on the agenda for approval at the November House of Delegates meeting. This document expresses much of SUAA’s mission, defending and advocating for member and SURS participant benefits while also advancing the interests of Illinois’ system of higher education.

SUAA membership continues to be a top priority, especially as SURS participants along with our college and university organizations contend with a wide range of personnel and organizational challenges. I have enjoyed confering with our new NIU Chapter President, Andy Small, on several matters related to the SUAA organization. As Andy summarized during a recent Chapter meeting, much of our profile as an organization relates to the question of “relevance.” Here, SUAA stands out as being especially relevant with its direct focus on the essential retirement, health insurance, and benefits security interests of faculty and staff personnel throughout Illinois higher education.

The SUAA’s mission is specific to protecting and advancing the long-term retirement and benefit security for all SURS participants. These benefits are a fundamental aspect of the basic compensation package provided to Illinois’ college and university personnel. Through its mission, SUAA also supports the funding, strength, and human resources of our higher education institutions. The SUAA organization operates in partnership with our local Chapters, institutional leadership, labor, SURS, and other organizations. At the same time, Executive Director Linda Brookhart and the State office in Springfield maintain an active and continuous interface with the State Legislature and governmental operations. They provide a strong and proven organizational structure where everyone has an important role to play. At the Chapter level, NIU continues to stand out as one of the state’s most active and successful Chapters. Thanks to everyone for their continuing commitment to the SUAA organization!

Steven Cunningham
Board member

Trips and Travel Schedule

Organized by Steven Johnson, Culture and Travel Committee Chair
Director, LA&S External Programming (retired)

2021 Travel Schedule

November 11: Holiday Inn, The Fireside Theatre
($145/$155) ONE SEAT LEFT!
November 27: Chicago Shopping trip ($20.21)
See sign up below
December 29: FROZEN, holiday matinee, Chicago, $195

2022 Schedule

Jan 23-Feb 13: Polar Vortex escape
21-day Caribbean cruise
Feb 20-26: New Orleans (value trip, $749)
March 2: COME FROM AWAY, matinee, Chicago
April 3-12: AMERICAN QUEEN
[New Orleans to Memphis]
April 21-May 1: Tulip time on the Jewel of the Rhine
[Zurich to Amsterdam]
May 8-14: Niagara Falls & Toronto (value trip, $649)
May 30-June 3: Nashville Show trip (value trip, $743)
June 6-11: Lancaster & the Dutch Country
[value trip, $849]
June: Alaska and the Yukon
June: Oberammergau and the Best of Germany
July 25-29: Stratford Festival of Canada
August 2-27: Canada, New England and Iceland
[cruise from Boston]
September 7-16: The Best of Scandinavia
[Sweden/Norway/Denmark]
October 11-20: Lakes and Majestic Mountain Adventures
[Italy/France/Switzerland]
Oct 25-Nov 3: Red Rocks to the Rockies
[Rocky Mountain and National Parks]
December 3: Christmas Shopping trip ($20.22)

Photo by Elena Haliczer, Contemporary Photographer, from her collection Witness to the Empty
Thank you, Bob!
The NIUAA would like to thank Robert Self for his many years of service to the association. Bob has recently retired from his latest role of being our newsletter editor for the past 7 years. Thank you, Bob, for your dedication and service.

Lifelong Learning Institute
By Joanne Dillman

The NIU Lifelong Learning Institute (LLI), established in 2000, is a member-directed group of individuals primarily age 50+ who enjoy learning in informal, flexible, non-competitive groups and like connecting with peers who share their interests. No grades, no tests – just learning for the fun of it. Our LLI is open to everyone, whatever your level of education or background. All you need is a sense of curiosity and a love of learning. Volunteers lead classes during each term and may be members or non-members.

LLI is looking forward to the winter 4-week term of classes beginning January 17-February 11, 2022. This will be the last session that will be completely Zoomed! While we have enjoyed continuing our classes, both conveners and participants have missed the more personal experience of the classroom.

Classes for the Winter Term include Armchair Italy-Sicilian Sights, with Conveners Louis Deprin and Edna Barbour; Tales from Texas with Convener Jean Callary; and Place Names: Where and Why, with Conveners Pat Vary and Dan Dillman. We will also have our usual series of interesting and provocative Notables presentations every Tuesday afternoon, hosted by Marlin Tenboer and Diane Shaffer.

Beginning January 17-February 11, 2022, the Spring Term, March 22-May 12, is in the planning stages and will be the same format of member-taught classes. The Spring Term will be mostly in-person classes but will include a few Zoom classes.

In Memoriam

Edna Barbour
Anne Birbereck
Hank Brooks
Louis Deprin
Joan Smith
Dennis Stoia
Ray Talbot
Marlin Tenboer
James Webster
John Rooney
Donald Scriven
Diane Shaffer
Ibteasam Dessouky
Anna Fischer
Mary Grosch
James Harder
Leonard Koubi
Wallace Mcalister
Robert McLadden
Ronald Provencer
Gordon Rasmussen
Sean Shesgreen
Martin Williams

Note: The NIUAA would like to thank Robert Self for his many years of service to the association. Bob has recently retired from his latest role of being our newsletter editor for the past 7 years. Thank you, Bob, for your dedication and service.
Please Note: Voting members of the NIUAA Board include all officers and those listed as Directors.