

# The NIU Annuitant – November 2024

## President’s Remarks by Toni Tollerud

Hello, NIUAA Chapter Members and Friends! If you’ve been in the Chicagoland area, I hope you’ve been enjoying the wonderful weather of the last several weeks.

I want to highlight some of the important issues the NIU Annuitants Board has been working on since the start of this fiscal year. First is Membership! If you have been following us, you know that NIU’s chapter is #1 (ONE!) in the state for having the most members join SUAA and our chapter, with 1430 members. This is amazing considering we don’t have the highest numbers for potential members. Each of you helps to make this happen by supporting SUAA, so please watch your membership and renew when it is time. Or reach out to colleagues you know and ask them to join. We serve an important purpose in guarding our pension plans, looking out for our health care, and lobbying legislators on key issues. Let me share a few more facts about SUAA so you can tidy up your elevator speech in promoting it to others.

As we know, the State Universities Annuitants Association is the premier organization in the State of Illinois solely dedicated to promoting and protecting the interests of participants in the State Universities Retirement System. It has a record of success in protecting retiree benefits. SUAA, along with other groups, successfully sued the State of Illinois in 2014 over legislation enacted to transfer the cost of health insurance to retirees and diminish retirement benefits. The Illinois Supreme Court found both legislative acts to be unconstitutional. SUAA also led a successful campaign to defeat a constitutional amendment deemed to be detrimental to its members. And SUAA will be there to defend the current constitution’s “pension protection clause” in the event a constitutional convention is held at some time in the future.

Some of SUAA’s activities which are beneficial to us are:

* Issuing updates on legislation being considered in Springfield that affect its members.
* Testifying before legislative committees to provide balanced information when changes impacting its members are being considered.
* Networking with legislators to increase SUAA’s visibility and influence.
* Engaging lobbyists who work to advance SUAA’s legislative platform.
* Advocating for enhanced benefits for Tier II employees.

SUAA has two other components: the SUAA Foundation and SUAAction. The Foundation is a not-for-profit charity which provides emergency and survivor assistance to members, offers scholarships to members and their children and grandchildren, and gives professional development grants to employee members. Last year, a child and grandchild of two of our members each received a $1,000 scholarship.

How can we judge SUAA’s impact in Springfield? Michael Fortner, a current board member and former member of the Illinois House of Representatives, was asked how SUAA is viewed by members of the General Assembly. He said SUAA is highly regarded by legislators and its position on issues before the legislature are given due consideration, reflecting its reputation as an honest and fair voice on matters of retirement benefits and funding. He also noted that SUAA’s physical presence in Springfield enhances its ability to have meaningful contact with legislators. I hope all these interesting tidbits help you understand how important it is to be a member and promote SUAA/NIUAA.

**In other news:**

* Jim Lockard has decided to step down from his role as chair of the Legislative Committee. We will miss Jim’s insightful and thought-provoking words. Please join me in thanking him at [*jlockard@niu.edu*](mailto:jlockard@niu.edu). We are especially fortunate that Steve Cunningham, current Past President of the SUAA Board, has stepped forward to take on this important job of communicating key information to us. Thank you, Steve!
* Please keep Tuesday, June 24, 2025 open for our annual NIUAA Membership Meeting. Time and place are yet to be determined. But we want you there!!!
* During the months of October and November, members from the NIUAA Board attended meetings on campus with the Faculty Senate, Operating Staff Council and SPS Council to share updates about who we are and to encourage members to join. Remember, you don’t have to retire to be a member. Spouses are also welcome to join. These meetings have been received with great enthusiasm.
* Finally, very recently, five of our members attended the SUAA Delegates Assembly: myself, plus Terry Borg, Andy Small, Paul Stoddard and Clair Williams. Thank you, colleagues! Please read Clair Williams’s highlights from the meeting to get the latest rundown.

Take care this fall and stay safe and in good health.

Warmly, Toni

*Toni Tollerud, NIUAA President*

## University Benefits Committee Report

The University Benefits Committee (UBC) meets monthly to discuss benefits-related topics for current employees and annuitants. At the first meeting of the 2024-25 academic year, John Boswell was named Chair. The UBC will follow the past practice of member representatives raising benefits topics to discuss. If you have any topics that you want considered by the UBC, please pass them on to me at tborg2@niu.edu.

**TRAIL MAPD 2025:** Open Enrollment from the State of Illinois and Aetna is happening from October 15 to November 15, 2024. This open enrollment is for the coverage period from January 1 to December 31, 2025. In October 2024, the State of Illinois hosted many in-person and virtual TRAIL Seminars to provide additional information and answer questions. I attended one last year and found it very helpful.

If as an Annuitant you would like to be informed of university announcements, you may opt in by adding your email address at <https://enroll.niu.edu/register/employeeoptin> DoIT and Marketing and Communication are reviewing systems whereby such announcements are pushed directly to annuitants’ Outlook email accounts without having to exercise this “opt in” option. Stay tuned! If you would like to see past Announcements, go to <https://www.niu.edu/emmc/web-internal-communications/announcements/employees.shtml>

*Terry Borg, NIUAA Vice President and UBC Chair*

## SUAA House of Delegates Meeting Report

On October 15th the State Universities Annuitants Association held its annual fall meeting of the House of Delegates. Our chapter delegates were Andy Small, Clair Williams, Paul Stoddard, Terry Borg, and Toni Tollerud. We found the meeting to be very informative and want to provide you with a summary of its activities.

The keynote speaker was Michael Halpin, the Senator from District 36. Among his committee assignments are Higher Education (Co-Chair) and the Special Committee on Pensions. Senator Halpin addressed several questions dealing with pensions from funding levels to the Tier II plan. It was his opinion that, during the upcoming legislative veto session, the only action taken on pensions would be making sure the Tier II plan’s benefits were sufficient so that the state would continue to be exempt from participation in social security. He thought any improvements to the Tier II plan and pension funding would not be addressed until the spring ’25 legislative session.

The delegates approved the SUAA Legislative Platform. The platform serves as a guideline for positions the Association will take on issues impacting it members. Those included opposition to any change in the state’s constitutional provision protecting retirement benefits, supporting improvements to the Tier II plan, providing health care options, and the repeal of the Social Security Windfall Elimination Provision and the Government Pension Offset.

SUAA Treasurer Larry Kloc presented the proposed budget for calendar year 2025. To offset declining income from membership dues, SUAA is looking to expand revenue from outside sources such as commissions earned on travel booked through SUAA.

The Association’s Executive Director, Bryan Soady, reported on the ongoing efforts to increase membership and the need to find ways to connect with younger university and community college employees through means of communication such as Facebook and X (formerly Twitter). He also shared steps the SUAA Board of Directors is taking to ensure the association remains relevant to its members.

*Clair Williams*

## In Memoriam

Betty Albrecht

Ralph Benbow

Wayne Bettner

Eleanor Broadus

Richard Fogel

Gerald Halverson

Myron Kuropas

Perry Larsen

Theodore McLean

Louis Mustari

Donald Raney

Margaret Sechrest

William Siavelis

Harvey Slade

Joyce Trahan

Betty Tsao

Judith Wallace

## Trips and Travel Schedule

*Organized by Steven Johnson*

*Culture and Travel Committee Chair*

*Director, LA&S External Programming (retired)*

### Travel Report

In July, our NIUAA group visited the Stratford Festival in Canada. The weather was perfect! We enjoyed excellent performances and look forward to attending the Festival again in 2025. Among the NIU employees and retirees were Jeanette Biava, Juliann Olsen, Pat Vary, Ray Dembinski, Greg Anderson, and Clair Williams.

### 2024 Schedule

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| **Dates** | **Travel Event** |
| December 17–January 3 | Holiday Cruise to Hawaii |

### 2025 Schedule

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| **Dates** | **Travel Event** |
| January | Polar Vortex Escape Cruise |
| March 7–25 | Mekong River Cruise |
| May 14–24 | Portugal and Douro River Cruise |
| July | Stratford Festival of Canada |
| September 29–November 20 | Tales of the South Pacific |
| October 1–12 | Best of Ireland |
| November 30–December 8 | Christmas Market Cruise on the Danube |

## NIUAA Scholarship Committee Report

The Association’s scholarships for the 2024–2025 academic year were awarded to Quentin Brown and Damaris Dumont. Both students are enrolled in the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences. Quentin is a senior majoring in journalism and Damaris is also a senior majoring in economics. In their thank-you notes, recipients often stress the importance of their scholarships in allowing them to focus more on their studies.

Through member gifts to the Association’s Scholarship Fund, we have been able to assist eleven students pursue their goals of obtaining a college degree through the award of scholarships totaling $17,375.00.

Besides helping students attain their educational goals, gifts to the Scholarship Fund can be a way to honor or memorialize a friend, co-worker, or loved one by making a gift to the fund in their name. Simply mark the gift form with your intention. If you want the honoree or the family to receive a tribute card, please include a mailing address on the gift form. A donation form can be found at this link: [https://www.niu.edu/annuitants/\_pdf/annuitant-association scholarship-donate-form.pdf](https://www.niu.edu/annuitants/_pdf/annuitant-association%20scholarship-donate-form.pdf)

With your continued support, we hope we can increase the amounts awarded to make getting an NIU degree more affordable for students.

*Clair Williams*

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A group of people posing for a photo

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**the NIU ANNUITANT**Northern Illinois University Foundation  
DeKalb, Illinois 60115-2882****

## NIUAA 2024-2025 Officers, Directors and Committee Chairs

### Officers

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **President** | Toni Tollerud | 1622 Carlisle Ln.  DeKalb, IL 60115 | 815- 501-4784 | [tonitollerud@gmail.com](mailto:tonitollerud@gmail.com) |
| **Vice President** | Terry Borg |  |  | [tborg2@niu.edu](mailto:tborg2@niu.edu) |
| **Secretary** | Pat Wielert |  |  | [pwielert63@gmail.com](mailto:pwielert63@gmail.com)) |
| **Treasurer** | Paul Stoddard |  |  | [prs17@yahoo.com](mailto:prs17@yahoo.com) |
| **Past President** | Andy Small | 1512 N 1st St. DeKalb, IL 60115 | 815-762-5971 | [asmall1@niu.edu](mailto:asmall1@niu.edu) |
| **Parliamentarian** | Ferald Bryan |  | 815-753-7100 | [fbryan@niu.edu](mailto:fbryan@niu.edu) |

### Directors

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### Committee Chairs

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Audit & Finance** | Michael Fortner |  |  | [mikefortner@earthlink.net](mailto:mikefortner@earthlink.net) |
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