Each year, many public education employees retire from public school systems in the United States. These retired education employees represent a reservoir of knowledge, experience, and talent that can serve as valuable resources for the National Education Association and its affiliates. Retired members are interested in and committed to public education, they are informed about educational issues, and they are willing to work with active members toward mutual goals.

NEA-Retired was created to serve the needs that retired educators across the country have identified, specifically:

- Protecting and improving retiree pension plans;
- Protecting and improving health benefits;
- Protecting Social Security;
- Protecting Medicare;
- Prescription drug coverage;
- Achieving legislative and political action goals for NEA-Retired members, public education employees, and public schools.

Equally important, NEA-Retired provides its members with a wide range of benefits through NEA Member Benefits.

**Where We Have Been**

In 1947, some retired NEA members created the National Retired Teachers Association (NRTA). The NEA Representative Assembly (RA) in 1950 adopted an amendment to the NEA Bylaws to create a membership category for retired members who had been Active NEA members “for at least five years prior to retirement.” The Bylaw specified these members “shall have the same rights and privileges of an Active member, except the right to vote, to serve as a delegate in the Representative Assembly, and to hold office.”

The San Francisco RA in 1951 granted NEA departmental status to the National Retired Teachers Association (NRTA), which was founded in 1947. The NEA-NRTA relationship continued until September 1, 1975, the year the NEA Constitution and Bylaws (adopted by the 1973 RA) became fully operative. This Constitution did not provide for departments in the NEA structure, effectively ending the relationship with NRTA. In February 1982, the NEA Board of Directors received a report suggesting the need for an NEA-Retired membership program providing specific governance rights for retired members. The board authorized the further development of the program and the preparation of a package of amendments to implement it. In 1983, NEA-Retired was created to organize and serve retired education employees of the Association. However,
NEA had long served its retired members prior to the establishment of NEA-Retired. These amendments were presented to and adopted by the RA in two successive years – 1983 and 1984. An amendment adopted in 1983 by the RA established NEA-Retired as a special program of NEA and redefined the Retired membership class, the rights of Retired members, and included NEA-Retired representation on NEA’s Board of Directors.

NEA-Retired is governed by the NEA Constitution and Bylaws and by the NEA-Retired Bylaws, which are adopted by the NEA Board of Directors. Each NEA state affiliate has a membership structure to accommodate its retired members. All state affiliates have state retired organizations and have adopted a unified structure. NEA-Retired membership today is more than 205,000 and continues to lead the way in public education and on critical issues such as advocacy for great public schools, Social Security, health care, and adequate pensions.

One standout effort occurred in 1995 during the White House Conference on Aging. Thirteen NEA-Retired leaders developed resolutions advocating public education which were ultimately adopted by the conference and forwarded to the White House as recommended national policy. NEA-Retired was the only organization at the conference to advocate for public education in that setting.

**Where We Are Now**

In 2008 NEA-Retired will celebrate its 25th Anniversary. Organizing efforts and program development have helped NEA-Retired become the fastest growing constituency within NEA. Nearly a quarter million retirees have joined NEA-Retired. Recent developments of Continuous Membership programs in states such as Michigan, Kentucky, Iowa and Alaska will see that number increase substantially over the next five years. Program developments in the areas of membership recruitment, intergenerational mentoring, literacy and political advocacy have also made NEA-Retired a viable retirement option for many Active NEA members. Surveys of NEA members indicate that they want a national program that provide opportunities for retirees to stay involve in the educational profession while protecting their benefits and fighting for retirement security issues. The current and future initiatives and programs NEA-Retired are doing exactly what members asked for and should be used as organizing tools.
Where We Are Going

The future growth of NEA-Retired is indeed very bright. With the above programs and partnerships, NEA-Retired will continue to grow and serve Active and Retired members. The potential for sustained growth is enormous. By the year 2010, NEA will have approximately 1.2 million of its current active members eligible for retirement. Whether they choose to become NEA-Retired members will depend on how well we organize around and promote NEA-Retired programs and benefits. We must continue to survey Active and Retired members to understand their needs so that we may better serve them. The adage “Build it and they will come” is so true when it comes to NEA-Retired. Retiring members are more likely to join an organization on the move that is serving the needs of retirees, working for the education profession they are retiring from and helping to improve the quality of life of Americans.

Remember, it is not what you are retiring from, but what you are retiring to that will attract new members. NEA-Retired will continue to develop relevant programs to serve the association and all of its members.