

BREA News

www.brea.bnl.gov



Volume 8, Issue 2

September 30, 2008

BREA Meetings

There are monthly BREA meetings, usually at noon on the second Tuesday of the month in Berkner Hall. All BREA members are invited to attend. We would like your participation in our meetings.

BREA Meeting Schedule:

- October 8
- November 12
- December 10
- January 14, 2009

BREA Officers

PRESIDENT:
Arnold Peskin
Vice President:
Robert Marr
Treasurer:
Ken Mohring
Secretary:
Dave Cox
Newsletter Editor:
Graham Campbell

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Once again I am using the BREA Newsletter to help inform the membership of notable activities involving the organization from my perspective. On this occasion I would like to report on a recent meeting Graham Campbell and I had with Laboratory Director Sam Aronson and HR Director Bill Hempfling. There is a fairly long tradition of BREA officers periodically meeting with BNL management over issues pertaining to retirees, lest they forget about our concerns due to the press of their day-to-day business.

I am pleased to say that both Sam and Bill are well aware of BREA and seem to be very sympathetic to our viewpoint. We discussed such things as communication with CIGNA and other

HMOs, TIAA-CREF, the status of the BREA office in Bldg. 475 (which will soon be demolished), the email policy for retirees, relations with the BERA Board, and far from least, benefits. I am pleased to say that we heard nothing alarming on any front (no news is always good news on such topics) and there may be some improvements in communication and liaison in these important areas in the future.

But perhaps the most interesting thing about this meeting came out of my preparation for it. In order to put our best foot forward, I attempted to innumerate the ways that BREA is beneficial to the Laboratory. BREA makes a strong contribution to the Lab's community affairs primarily through the Commu-

nity Advisory Council, our members make charitable contributions through participation in the United Way campaign and the Blood Drive among others, and a significant number of our members continue to work at BNL through emeritus, guest appointments, volunteerism, and informal arrangements.

Clearly, BREA brings a lot to the table, and we have bargaining chips when we have concerns that must be brought to Lab Management. That was my message at the meeting and I think it was understood and appreciated. My message to the BREA membership is a similar one; BREA empowers the retiree community and your membership and efforts on the organization's behalf are a sound investment. After all, BREA is you.

WELCOME TO SHIRLEY

Dave Cox

Some of our readers may recently have heard about or noticed a new book with the intriguing title “Welcome to Shirley: Memoirs of an Atomic Town”. The author is Kelly McMasters, who teaches “creative writing” at Columbia University amongst other things, and has appeared on a number of Radio and TV shows to talk about her book. As might be inferred from the title, Brookhaven Laboratory features prominently in the book in a decidedly unflattering way! The general tone of the book can be judged by a quote from her touring calendar (<http://booktour.com/author/>

kelly_mcmasters): “... indicting Brookhaven, a flawed nuclear facility and ‘one of the nation’s most hazardous waste offenders’, for allowing tritium and other radioactive substances to fatally contaminate the area’s groundwater and soil. So high were the cancer rates in Shirley, a street was dubbed Death Row..”. The book also resurrects the famous myth about the UFO which supposedly crashed in Southaven Park in November, 1992, citing the theory that “the laboratory had used a particle beam to zap the craft, and that the lab’s fire brigade had been dispatched to collect the bodies

of the aliens and hide the saucer”!

A glowing review of the book also appeared in the Long Island Advance on May 29th (www.longislandadvance.net/uploaded/ADV%2005-29-08.pdf). At the June meeting of the BREA Board, it was agreed unanimously that we should submit a strong rebuttal, which ultimately appeared as an Op-Ed column in the July 24th issue of the LIA. A copy of this letter, and a more detailed response to some of the statements made in the book by the BNL Community Relations Group can be found on the BREA website.

TRIPS

Dave Cox

As we all know, BERA sponsors a variety of trips for lab employees throughout the year which are listed in the Bulletin each week. Most of these are scheduled for the weekend, of course, but BERA has told us that they would be willing to consider sponsoring midweek trips aimed primarily at retirees living in the vicinity if there is sufficient interest. One possibility would be a Wednesday

trip to the city for people to attend a Broadway show, visit a museum, or just wander around; a second might be a trip to Eastern Long Island to visit Montauk or tour some local wineries maybe, and so on. For those interested, please contact me by phone (286-9725), email (expatdave@aol.com), or write to me at 50, Circuit Rd, Bellport, NY 11713.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

To find out if you have renewed your membership in BREA for the current year, please check the mailing label on the newsletter. Your membership is paid up until the end of the year shown after your name on the label (or for life if specified). If you see the year 2007, you have *not* renewed your membership for 2008, so please renew as soon as possible if you wish to continue to receive future editions of the newsletter.

NOTES ABOUT TIAA-CREF

Graham Campbell

I have to repeat that this is a personal view by someone with no special training or knowledge of financial affairs. –Ed.

As I write this, the financial mar-

kets are in turmoil. A lot of people are concerned about the impact on their retirement funds. There are no certain answers and

I certainly have none. However I have observed that most “experts” agree on a couple of recommendations. One is di-

(Continued on page 4)

BREA INFORMATION SYSTEMS COMMITTEE (BRISC)

Like most organizations, BREA relies on the use of computers for a significant portion of its activities. These include its membership database, the BREA newsletter, archiving of minutes and agenda of meetings, the Web page (www.brea.bnl.gov) and the BREA list-serve (brea-l).

At the BREA meeting on May 13, the need for better documentation and backup of these activities was raised. It was felt it would be beneficial for the various persons involved to have some means of interacting and sharing their knowledge. The BREA Information Systems Committee (BRISC) was formed to look into this matter in more

detail. Committee members are: Graham Campbell, Dave Cox, Ronnie Evans, Bob Marr (chair), Paul Michael, Al Smith and Joyce Tichler.

At BRISC's first meeting, it was agreed that, in place of the present somewhat *ad hoc* arrangements for each activity, standard operating procedures should be established and documented, and an additional person designated as backup to the person primarily running the activity. In this way, it is hoped that an institutional memory for all BREA computer-related activities would be assured, and the possibility of a "single point of failure" minimized.

Other topics that the committee plans to address include whether or not to adopt standardized software with a standardized maintenance protocol across the various activities, and a number of issues concerning the BREA Web page. With regard to the latter, the committee is particularly interested in ways the Web page might be designed to improve members' access to both current and archived information concerning BREA. Suggestions from members about this and other topics before the committee are most welcome and may be addressed to Bob Marr at arbymarr@optonline.net.

NEWS FROM THE MEMBERS

A new feature of the newsletter is news from members. These are short notes about their current interests and whereabouts. All submissions are welcomed.

George Taylor

January 16, 2007

It was with some degree of guilt that I discovered that I had not returned the candidate ballot on time. The date on my BREA renewal check shows how long ago I intended to write this letter.

In some back issue of the BREA News, I recall there was a request for retirees to share their interesting exploits after leaving the Lab. Here's mine.

One day Arnie Peskin asked for two volunteers to take a volun-

tary layoff. As luck would have it I was wearing my sneakers when I heard the news and bounded up the stairs and got to his office first!

Leaving BNL with my sail-plane, instructor rating, savings, and almost 30 years of retirement, I set out for the Colorado Rockies from Bayport. I had to try some of that mountain soaring. And what soaring it was! The field elevation at Boulder Municipal was over a mile high and only about 2 miles from the foothills. We routinely got high enough to use supplemental oxygen.

Then one day I was approached and asked to do some volunteer instructing for Civil Air Patrol

Cadets for two weeks each spring. With proper instruction these Cadets become our country's future fighter pilots, transport pilots, or desk pilots. Our program had some similarity to the glider flight-training program at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs. For a minor fee, the Cadets got all the ground school and flight training it took for a safe and legal solo. Even our cooks were Air Force reservists who were fulfilling their two-week obligation by providing all of us with 3 squares. Not a scrap of junk food was to be found anywhere!

The instructor pilots and retired military pilots could participate in a 17-day special tour package to mainland China as special

SOME TIAA-CREF CONSIDERATIONS

Graham Campbell

(Continued from page 2)

versification. Another is “Don’t panic”. Diversification is fairly straightforward. My personal interpretation of “Don’t panic” is that if your finances are currently adjusted to your own risk/reward values, don’t be in too much of a hurry to change. But it is a good time to review your finances. Although your investments in general may be doing poorly, your first priority must be to not make them worse.

In performing this review it is good to keep in mind the special nature of the TIAA Traditional account. TIAA guarantees a minimum rate of return on this account, however with-

drawals from this account are very restricted. (*This is an informal description of the process, order the booklet “Transfer Payout Annuities: Making Transfers from TIAA Traditional “from the Web site for a full description, see below)* In order to move funds from TIAA Traditional to other accounts, you must transfer a specific amount to a Transfer Payout Annuity and that Annuity will then transfer the money to the destination you specify in 10 annual payments.

The automatic redistribution tool that TIAA-CREF offers has always struck me as a good thing for keeping to your desired diversification. However I

have recently discovered some “gotcha’s”. They will not automatically redistribute any contract from which regular disbursements are being made. This includes Minimum Distribution Option contracts as well as others. Also, for the accounts that they will automatically redistribute, they regard the TIAA Traditional as an “illiquid” account and will only move funds into it, not out of it.

The TIAA-CREF Web site has a number of publications that are very useful. They can be read on the Web or a printed copy (free) can be ordered. Simply go to <http://www.tiaa-cref.org>, then select “Education and Support”, then “Publications”, then “View all”.

NEWS FROM MEMBERS—GEORGE TAYLOR

(Continued from page 3)

guests of the BAA/US Aviators China Tour. Our accommodations were all in 4 and 5 star hotels in Beijing, Xi’an, Kunming, Guilin, and Shanghai. All banquets and intercity air fare was included in one low price.

Then one day while standing with my group in the airline terminal of Kunming, I spied someone staring at me



with a look of recognition from a gift shop across the way. It was Peter Kroger from BNL!

What a surprise to meet again after so much time and distance. My early memory of him was when I was shift working computer operator and he was a researcher who occasionally came to the service window to retrieve his Fortran deck and output!

Another computer user was a grad student from Virginia Tech who later became my wife and we now live near Los Alamos National Lab.

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BNL Retired Employees Association

*On the Web at
www.brea.bnl.gov*

THE 2008 REUNION

