

## APERS & ATRS retiree health plans merged

## *The Director's Corner*

Effective January 1, 2007 retirees from APERS and the Arkansas Teacher Retirement System (ATRS) rolled into one health program called **ARHealth Retirees**. Coverage automatically transferred for all retirees on that date - so retirees did not have to take any action. The Employee Benefits Division of the Arkansas Department of Finance and Administration administers this new plan.



There's an important change under the new plan. Members are no longer required to select a Primary Care Physician (PCP), and they no longer need a referral for

APERS finished out the calendar year on a high note. Our investment program returned a handsome 14.9% for the twelve months ending 12/31/06. This double-digit return gave the retirement system better than top quartile ranking among all public funds for the last three years and in the top third of all public funds over the last five years. The dollar amount of assets under management swelled to nearly \$5.25 billion at the same time – no mean feat when the system actually pays out about \$60 million more in benefits than it receives in the form of employee and employer contributions.

care. Through Health Advantage's Blue Card Program, retirees now have access to a wide network of participating health providers in and out of state. In addition, retirees with primary Medicare now have flexibility to visit any physician or hospital of their choice as long as the provider accepts Medicare assignment - EBD will coordinate the benefits.

As of this writing, the legislative session appears to be in its final days. While there has been much activity, relatively few bills affecting APERS have actually passed into law. A benefit multiplier increase was achieved, bringing the 1.75% multiplier (2.03% for contributory) forward to July 1, 2007. Service accrued after that date will receive the original multiplier of 1.72% (2.00% for contributory). For members retiring on or before June 1, 2007, a 1.0% ad hoc increase will be added to their annuity. Members who have been retired for at least twelve months will get the 1.0% increase as well as the annual 3.0% cost of living adjustment.

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Of special note was a part of the Governor's budget package for state employees. Effective July 1, 2007 career recognition payments will now count toward retirement

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If you have questions about your health insurance plans, call the Employee Benefits Division at (501) 682-9656. Callers outside Pulaski County may call the Division toll-free at 1-877-815-1017.

## APERS starts a Call Center

To better serve our calling customers, APERS recently launched a new call center. The intent is to reduce misdirected or dropped calls and increase our member's overall satisfaction when they call.

The call center connects callers with the APERS staff member or unit that can best help the caller. Initial calls to the agency will still go to a main receptionist first. From there, anyone that does not need to speak directly to Executive Office staff will be transferred to a call center employee.

The call center worker will then ask callers for some basic information such as their name, status (member or retiree), address, telephone, and Social Security number, as well as the purpose of the call. This may be a little more information than callers have been asked to give in previous calls to APERS, but the agency's goal is to use the information to help callers get their calls resolved as efficiently as possible. The call center will be able to answer many

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## The Director's Corner

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as will the lump sums received by employees who are at the top end of their grade's pay range.

Senate bill 39 (Miller, D-Melbourne), which died in committee, would have extended the Deferred Retirement Option Plan (DROP) from seven to ten years. An interim study on all systems' DROP programs was proposed instead. As it happens, recent IRS guidance on the provisions of the new federal Pension Protection Act of 2006, suggests that there are to be age-based limitations placed on the amount of money an individual can take as a lump sum benefit so as to comply with the IRS Section 415 limitations. We will pass this information on to the membership as we learn more.

APERS would like to thank legislative retirement committee co-chairs Sen. Jimmy Jeffress (D-Crossett) and Rep. Eric Harris (R-Lowell), as well as Sen. Steve Faris (D-Malvern) for their generous help in passing retirement legislation benefiting the members and retirees of the Arkansas Public Employees Retirement System. We would also like to thank Governor Beebe and his staff for "watching our backs" throughout the entire legislative process.

## Moved recently?

When you move, please inform APERS in writing. You can use the Change of Address form at: [www.apers.org](http://www.apers.org). Or send a handwritten letter with your signature stating your new address. Remember to post your Social Security number on correspondence you mail APERS. A form can be mailed if you call us at (501) 682-7800. Persons outside Pulaski County can call toll-free, 1-800-682-7377.

## APERS Call Center

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of our member's questions, and if they cannot answer the question, they will make sure that the caller is connected to the right staff member.

Aside from assisting the call center in resolving questions efficiently, the information callers provide will help the agency build its database of the most frequently requested issues from active and retired members, employers and the general public. Evaluations of this information will help the agency in providing the information the public wants and hopefully improve its overall customer service and satisfaction. Callers in the Little Rock area may call

APERS at (501) 682-7800. Callers outside Pulaski County may call, toll-free, 1-800-682-7377.

## health plans

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Here are some other benefits offered by the new plan:

- The University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS), Cooper Clinic, P.A., in Fort Smith, and St. Vincent Infirmary in Little Rock joined the plan's providers list.
- Two basic dental screenings and teeth cleanings a year, and one vision screening once every two years, were added as a preventive care benefit.

*(Information courtesy of the Employment Benefits Division newsletter, The EBD Buzz, 4th Quarter 2006).*

## APERS PROFILE

### Employee Profile for: **Craig Blackard**



In 2006 Craig Blackard rejoined the Arkansas Public Employees Retirement System as the agency's Internal Auditor. His duties require him to perform annual audits in all areas of APERS to ensure agency compliance with established policy, procedures and retirement legislation.

Craig returned to APERS after he left the agency in 2005 to work with the Arkansas Department of Finance and Administration. Altogether, Craig has worked 11 years with APERS. He first worked in the APERS Investments Section, later served members and retirees as a Retirement Counselor, and then moved to supervise the agency's Benefits Unit before he left to work at the DF&A.

Craig has lived in Lonoke, AR, for 31 years, and recently earned from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock his bachelor of science degree in accounting. He is planning to take the CPA examination in the future.

He and his wife of 18 years, Pam, have two sons, Taylor, 15 and Peyton, 8. Craig's interests are sports and hunting, but he mostly likes to hunt for a good golf game on the links when he has the time!

## APERS Forms Online

Often retirees will call to ask if he or she can change their address or change their beneficiary over the phone. Unfortunately, APERS cannot change a member's personal information by phone.

A member must send in an official APERS form to change personal information, or a signed, written request (the request must include a signature and the Social Security number of the member).

If you're in a hurry to get a form to change your address, name, or other information, the APERS website might be your quickest option.

The forms can be found under the Forms section on the [www.APERS.org](http://www.APERS.org) website. Here you can find the most common forms for both our active and retired members.

What advantages does it offer? Mainly, you don't have to call APERS and wait for the agency to mail you a form, which you have to then fill out and return. If the form gets lost in the mail (a rare occurrence), this could further slow you.

If you have access to a computer and printer, most APERS forms can be printed immediately. To print out a form, you must have Adobe Acrobat Reader installed on your computer, as the forms are in a PDF format.

If you don't have Adobe Acrobat Reader, you can download it for free at <http://www.adobe.com>.

Some important points to know:

➤ At this time, you can't fill out APERS forms on the website. You have to print and then fill them out.

➤ APERS cannot accept faxed or e-mailed forms for most official transactions. An original form with the retiree's original signature must be mailed. APERS also needs the Social Security number of the member or

retiree to identify the member in our files.

If you can't download a form or if you have any questions, call APERS at (501) 682-7800 or 1-800-682-7377, and request a form.

### Retiree Forms You Can Print From the APERS Website...

➤ **Change of Address**

➤ **Change of Name**

➤ **Change of Beneficiary**

➤ **Designation of Beneficiary**

➤ **PAW Rollover and Distribution Request**

➤ **State Tax Withholding Form**

➤ **W-4P Withholding Certificate for Pension or Annuity Payments**

➤ **Direct Deposit Authorization Form**

➤ **Lost Warrant Form and Instructions**

## Need long-term care insurance information?

Many retirees don't have long-term care insurance, and may question if they even need it. They may also wonder if government programs assist with such care, or if they will have to pay for such care themselves.

Well, you're not alone if you have such questions. To help retirees - and workers not yet retired - answer some of the questions they may have about this subject, there's a new website resource available - the National Clearinghouse for Long-Term Care Information at [www.longtermcare.gov](http://www.longtermcare.gov).

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services sponsors the website, which provides consumers comprehensive details to make informed decisions about choosing such care. The home page provides a wide range of information under three main topics:

➤ **Understanding Long-Term Care.** Under this topic, users can learn [Definitions & Risks](#) of long-term care; [Costs & Paying](#) for long-term care, and [Services & Providers](#) of long-term care

➤ **Planning For Long-Term Care.** This link gives details on the [Importance of Planning](#); [Planning Steps](#), and [Planning Information & Resources Available](#).

➤ **Paying For Long-Term Care.** This topic explains [Costs of Care](#), [Public Programs](#), and [Private Financing Options](#) that might assist with long-term care.

The website also gives links to other informational resources that may help interested persons decide whether or not they need to buy a long-term care insurance policy.

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APERSpective is a publication of the Arkansas Public Employees Retirement System and is distributed for the information of APERS annuitants, beneficiaries and survivors.

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## APERS parking

Retirees on APERS business can get free parking (if available) at the agency's parking deck. Drivers traveling on Louisiana St. (a one-way street) will turn left into the parking deck, located on Louisiana between Fourth St. and W. Capitol Ave. Once you finish your appointment, bring the parking ticket to the receptionist's desk on the fourth floor to have the ticket validated.

## 3% COLA to be paid

On July 1, 2007, APERS retirees and beneficiaries, including participants in the Deferred Retirement Option Plan, will receive a 3% cost of living increase in their retirement benefit.

The benefit is payable to any retiree who has been retired or participated in the DROP at least 12 months prior to July 1, 2007.

## Direct Deposit Dates

**May 1, 2007**  
**June 1, 2007**  
**July 2, 2007**  
**August 1, 2007**  
**September 4, 2007**  
**October 1, 2007**  
**November 1, 2007**  
**December 3, 2007**  
**January 2, 2008**

Deposits are made on the first workday of each month that doesn't fall on a holiday