

## Getting to know APERS...

### How does Benefit Accounting help you?

The Benefit Accounting Unit, a unit of the Administrative Services Section, helps retirees and beneficiaries with what is their most important issue – receiving their monthly benefit payments. Benefit Accounting is located on the fifth floor at 124 West Capitol Avenue in Little Rock.

Benefit Accounting staff issue direct deposit vouchers to checking and savings or other bank accounts established by retirees (about 90 percent of all APERS retirees receive benefits through this method, which is now a legal requirement) and mail checks to those retirees and survivors who have not yet established bank accounts.

At the end of January each year, the department also issues to retirees and survivors 1099-R statements, which details the amount in benefits received.

The staff assists many retirees on the phone with various issues. The department assists retirees with processing direct deposit change forms when retirees switch their bank accounts; accounting for and resending to retirees benefit checks that may have been stolen or lost in the mail; processing retirees' federal and state withholding forms to withhold state and/or federal taxes from checks; and processing payments for retirees or beneficiaries.

The staff also updates the payroll records of retirees and/or survivors when there is a change in the payee's status, such as a change of address, bank account, spouse, or beneficiary.

Benefit Accounting will deduct from a retiree's monthly benefit any state employee or public school employee insurance premiums, as directed by the retiree. **But to discuss specific insurance issues and questions, retirees should call the Employee Benefits Division, under the Department of Finance and Administration, at (501) 682-9656 or toll-free at 1-877-815-1017.**

The unit can usually handle business with retirees by mail or by phone. But staff will meet with retirees who cannot conduct their business otherwise. Benefit Accounting employees are available from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

However, it is recommended that retirees call before coming, because any questions a retiree may have may be handled on the phone and might save a retiree an unnecessary trip.

## The Director's Corner

Where did the summer go? Suddenly, it is again time to prepare for the upcoming legislative session, and we have a lot on our plate. There will be proposed legislation to create a comprehensive contributory program for APERS covered employees hired on or after July 1, 2005, as well as a large number of bills for the three other retirement systems administered by the APERS staff.

When we submit our budget for legislative review this fall, we will be asking the legislature for sufficient appropriation and personnel to set up a member call center. Our goal is to provide quick and accurate answers to your general questions. By routing these kinds of inquiries to a call center, we will enable our counseling staff to spend more time working for you on your individual and specific retirement needs. We think you will like the improved service the establishment of a call center could provide.

It is also worth reminding every member of APERS, whether active or retired, what a wonderful concept your defined benefit, or "DB" plan is. After working for the required number of years, you are guaranteed a monthly payment for the rest of your life. In the private sector, a defined benefit plan is an increasingly rare beast. Instead, companies set up defined contribution, or "DC" plans for their employees. In a DC plan, you elect to contribute some portion of your salary, and your employer may "match" that amount in contributions. Then you

## APERS PROFILE



### Employee profile on Michele Williams

Having previously worked as the Administrative Services Manager as well as the Member Services Manager, Michele Williams became APERS Deputy Director on July 1, 2001.

In addition to her duties as APERS Deputy Director, she is also the Deputy Director for the Arkansas State Police Retirement System, Arkansas Judicial Retirement System and, effective January 1, 2005, the Arkansas District Judges Retirement System.

Prior to coming to Arkansas, Michele worked in several financial relating positions that included Financial Analyst with Plasma Alliance, Inc. (a subsidiary of the Revlon Health Care Group), Accountant (Southeast Mental Health Center), and, Budget Analyst and Supervisor (City of Memphis). She began her career out of college in 1978 with the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company performing clerical accounting duties.

While in Arkansas, she has also worked for the Department of Finance and Administration as a Senior Budget Analyst and the Department of Human Services as the Budget and Banking Operations Manager. Ms. Williams received her Bachelor of Science Degree in Business Administration (Management emphasis) from Berea College, Berea, Kentucky. Ms. Williams has completed the required courses and been certified as an Arkansas Certified Public Manager (CPM) and is preparing to sit for the examination for the National CPM certificate. Ms. Williams is also a member of the Association of Governmental Accountants.

Direct Deposit Dates

December 1, 2004  
 January 3, 2005  
 February 1, 2005  
 March 1, 2005  
 April 1, 2005  
 May 2, 2005  
 June 1, 2005  
 July 1, 2005  
 August 1, 2005  
 September 1, 2005  
 October 3, 2005  
 November 1, 2005  
 December 1, 2005

## 2005 Social Security COLA News

The Cost-of-Living Adjustment, or COLA, prevents inflation from eroding Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits

The 2005 COLA is 2.7 percent for Social Security benefits and SSI payments.

As a result of the 2005 COLA, the average monthly Social Security retirement benefit will increase \$25.00.

## Questions About Your Insurance?

All inquiries regarding your insurance premiums should be directed to the Employee Benefits Division of the Department of Finance and Administration at (501) 682-9656 or toll free at 1-877-815-1017.

These calls should not be directed to APERS.

## The Director's Corner Continued from page 1

go out and figure out how to invest your money on your own. Whatever has accumulated in your account at retirement is what you have to make last the rest of your life.

There are many politicians out there who want to eliminate public employees' access to DB plans. They will tell you that DB plans are an unfair burden on taxpayers already groaning under the heavy cost of government.

Grover Norquist, president of the Americans for Tax Reform, has been quoted as saying, "Our goal is to cut government in half... and then drown the other half in the bath tub". Mr. Norquist,

and those who think like him, ignore the fact that the steady and continuous stream of retirement benefits paid out every year actually create economic stimulus. In 2003, DB plans contributed 2% to this nation's Gross Domestic Product. Furthermore, as any APERS retiree can tell you, the existence of their defined benefit has reduced or eliminated their dependence on federal, taxpayer-supported programs like Medicaid or similar welfare programs.

As the legislature convenes this winter, listen carefully to what the "No More Taxes" advocates are saying. Make sure that your senators and representatives understand the crucial role your defined benefit plays in both your own life and in the economy of Arkansas.

## When A Retiree Dies...

### *What the Beneficiary Should Know*

When applying for APERS retirement, a retiree is required to choose an annuity option that determines if his or her beneficiary will receive any benefit should the retiree die before the beneficiary.

To ensure any allowable benefit is paid to a beneficiary in a timely manner, some required procedures must occur following a retiree's death.

The first thing the surviving beneficiary should do is inform APERS as soon as possible so the Benefits Unit can send some required paperwork.

A beneficiary may contact the APERS Benefits Unit by calling 682-7800, or by calling the agency toll-free (for persons outside Pulaski County only) at 1-800-682-7377.

Occasionally APERS is informed of a retiree's death before a beneficiary notifies the agency. If this occurs, Benefits will initiate the process of sending required correspondence and forms.

The information sent includes a cover letter that explains the retirement option plan chosen by the retiree, and what benefit amount, if any, will be paid to the beneficiary once APERS receives all

required documents.

The letter will also inform the beneficiary to provide a copy of his or her Social Security card, and a certified copy of the retiree's death certificate.

Other forms Benefits sends with the letter include:

- A Direct Deposit Authorization Form (direct deposit is mandatory for new benefit payments).
- Forms for withholding of federal or state income tax (if applicable).

When the beneficiary receives this correspondence, the person should complete the forms and return them with any required documents as soon as possible.

The entire process can be handled by mail. If a beneficiary has questions or issues that cannot be answered via phone or by mail, the beneficiary can come to APERS for assistance.

APERS cannot pay any benefit to a beneficiary until all required forms are received and processed. The time this occurs varies on a case by case basis, as some beneficiaries may take longer to get all forms completed and returned.



For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2004, the APERS investment program earned a healthy 13.42% — nicely above our required rate of return of 8.0%.

While the first quarter of the new fiscal year closed in negative territory, we are hopeful for further gains in the coming months.

## 1099-R's Will Be Mailed By January 31, 2005



## Where Are You?

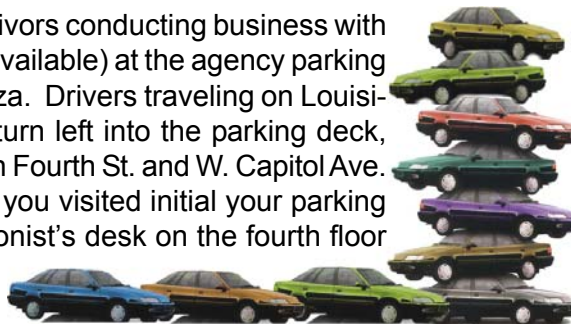
Whenever you move, inform APERS in writing. You can use the agency Change of Address form on the APERS website at [www.apers.org](http://www.apers.org). Or, call Information Services at (501) 682-7860 and a form will be mailed to you.

Please include your Social Security number on the Change of Address form.

[WWW.APERS.ORG](http://WWW.APERS.ORG)

## Parking options at APERS

Retirants and beneficiaries/survivors conducting business with APERS can get free parking (if available) at the agency parking deck at One Union National Plaza. Drivers traveling on Louisiana St. (a one-way street) will turn left into the parking deck, located on Louisiana St. between Fourth St. and W. Capitol Ave. Have the APERS staff member you visited initial your parking ticket, then come to the receptionist's desk on the fourth floor to have the ticket validated.



Arkansas Public Employees Retirement System  
124 West Capitol Avenue, Suite 400  
Little Rock, Arkansas 72201-1015

PRSR STD  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Little Rock, AR  
Permit No. 00483

In This Issue:  
Director's Corner  
Getting To Know APERS  
What a Beneficiary Should Know  
Direct Deposit Dates and more!

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

#### **APERS EXECUTIVE STAFF**

Gail H. Stone, Executive Director  
Michele Williams, Deputy Director

#### **APERS BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

Hon. Larry Fratesi, Chair  
Mr. Jonathan R. Sweeney, Vice Chair  
Mr. Richard Weiss  
Hon. Gus Wingfield  
Hon. Jim Wood  
Ms. Ouida Wright  
Mr. Don Zimmerman  
Mr. Maurice Henry  
Mr. Artee Williams

#### **Arkansas Public Employees Retirement System**

124 W. Capitol, Suite 400  
Little Rock, AR 72201  
501-682-7800  
1-800-682-7377

[www.apers.org](http://www.apers.org)

## FirstGov for Seniors website worth look

If you're a senior who uses the Internet to research services, you may want to check out a "one-stop" website designed specifically to link seniors to a multitude of e-government webpages of federal and state agencies.

The webpage – called FirstGov for Seniors - launched in September 2000 as part of a federal government sponsored search engine and website "clearinghouse" that connects web users with government resources. Originally funded from the budgets of federal agencies, the website now receives

an annual appropriation from the President's fiscal year budget. To get to the website, one must type in the following web address on their Internet browser:  
[www.firstgov.gov/Topics/Seniors](http://www.firstgov.gov/Topics/Seniors).

This opens the FirstGov for Seniors homepage. The page features links to websites for a variety of government agencies and services listed under the following eight categories:

*Consumer Protection*  
*Education, Jobs and Volunteerism*  
*Federal and State Agencies*  
*Health*  
*Laws and Regulations*  
*Retirement and Money*  
*Taxes*  
*Travel and Leisure*

