



# MERS MESSENGER

## Trustee Positions

### Board of Trustees

Susan Percle, Chair  
Retiree, City of Gretna

Phyllis McGraw,  
Vice Chair  
City Clerk, Bossier City

Mayor Barney Arceneaux  
City of Gonzales

Ty Carlos  
Executive Director, LCDA

Mayor Rich Dupree  
City of Pineville

Mayor Rodney Grogan  
City of Patterson

Rep. Roy Adams  
House  
Retirement Committee

Senator Robert Mills  
Senate Retirement  
Committee

Treasurer John Schroder  
State of Louisiana

Commissioner Jay Dardenne  
Division of  
Administration

Mayor Jennifer Vidrine,  
City of Ville Platte  
LMA President

There are three new members on the MERS Board of Trustees:

Mayor Rich Dupree of Pineville

Mayor Rodney Grogan of Patterson, and

Ty Carlos, Executive Director of the Louisiana Community Development Authority (LCDA)

Mayor Dupree and Mayor Grogan qualified without opposition for two of the positions for elected officials on the board. Those seats became open this summer.

Mayor Dupree replaces Abbeville Mayor Mark Piazza. Since Mayor Piazza did not run for re-election in Abbeville, he was no longer eligible to serve in a seat for elected officials. Mayor Dupree will serve the three years remaining on Mayor Piazza's term.

Mayor Grogan replaces Mayor Donald Villere, former Mayor of Mandeville. Mayor Grogan will serve a six-year term.

Another seat became open on the Board due to the resignation of Donald Clause. Mr. Clause, the Human Resources Director for the City of Thibodaux, left the City for a private sector opportunity. His resignation from Thibodaux meant he was no longer allowed to serve on the MERS Board.

Ty Carlos of the LCDA qualified unopposed for Mr. Clause's seat which must be filled by a non-elected official. Mr. Carlos will serve for the three years left on the term for Mr. Clause.

The service of Mayor Piazza, Mayor Villere, and Donald Clause was much appreciated!

In addition to these changes, there is a new President of the Louisiana Municipal Association (LMA). Mayor Jennifer Vidrine, the new LMA President, is an ex-officio member of the MERS Board. She has taken the reins for Grosse Tete Mayor Michael Chauffe. Richard Williams, Deputy Director of the LMA, remains as the designee for that seat.

We welcome the new members to the Board.

# Member Self Service Portal

Retirement education is critical, and the best way to stay informed about your retirement is to use the MERS Member Self Service Portal. We encourage you to sign up for MERS Member Self Service with your personal email address. Using a work email address will pose issues when you retire and no longer have access to that email account.

By registering your own account, you help prevent fraudsters from trying to access your information.

To register, go to the MERS website, [MERSLA.com](http://MERSLA.com), and click on Self Service Portal at the bottom of the homepage. Click on user registration to begin the self registration process and locate your account with MERS.

For all members of MERS, the member self service portal gives you the opportunity to monitor your account and accomplish many tasks in a paperless capacity.

The active members online services include the following:

- Update Address & Contact Information
- Change Beneficiary
- View Membership History
- Estimates of Monthly Retirement Benefits/DROP Benefits
- Employee Contribution Verification Letter
- Annual Member Statements

The retirees online services include the following:

- Update Address & Contact Information
- Benefit Income Verification Letter
- Change Banking Direct Deposit Information
- W4-P form available
- View last three months of benefit payments issued

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Member Self Service Portal .....	2	LAPERS Conference.....	5
COLA Adjustments .....	3	Employer Information .....	6
Legislative Session.....	4	Susita Suire Retirement Party...	7
Returning Retirees/Elected Officials .....	5	Staff Spotlight.....	8
Administrative Rules .....	5	Important Reminders .....	8



# Thank You For Your Service To MERS



Mayor Donald Villere, former Mayor of Mandeville, thanked for his service to the MERS Board of Trustees by Chair Susan Percle



Donald Clause, former Human Resources Director for the City of Thibodaux



Abberville Mayor Mark Piazza Receiving a Resolution for his service to the MERS Board of Trustees from Chair Susan Percle

## Cost-of-Living Adjustments (COLAs)

A 1.6% cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for eligible retirees and beneficiaries was effective starting with the July 1, 2022, benefit payment. It was calculated on the original benefit amount.

To be eligible for the COLA, retirees must have had an effective retirement date of July 1, 2021, or before. Beneficiaries (and/or the retiree) must have been receiving benefits since July 1, 2021.

COLAs funded by the retirement system are not guaranteed. When granted, COLAs must be funded for the lifetime of all retirees who will receive the adjustment.

MERS has a Funding Deposit Account that may be used to fund COLAs. Monies are deposited into the account when the employer contribution rate is set at a rate higher than the rate necessary to fund the system.

Since a COLA was granted this year, and the funding level of the system is less than 80%, current law states that the Board must wait four years before granting another COLA.

The Board at MERS understands the pressures that inflation has put on its retirees. This adjustment is not enough to match inflation but is the highest that the system could responsibly fund.



## Legislative Session

The 2023 session of the Louisiana Legislature is scheduled for April 10 through June 8. If any bills are filed impacting MERS that information will be included in the April 2023 MERS Messenger.

The bill sponsored by MERS in 2022, Senate Bill 9 by Senator Robert Mills, was passed and signed by the Governor. It is now Act 248 and it:

- Limits retroactive payment of benefits to members eligible for retirement at termination to 60 days from date of application.

- Allows all participating employers, not just municipalities, to use conversion of leave for retirement credit.

- Removes special ethics rules as to food and drink that were unique to MERS.

- Removes the requirement unique to MERS to report expenditures made for board members to the legislature.

- Changes the requirement for an actuarial experience study from every three years to every five years.

- Eliminates the rule that trustees may attend only one out-of-state conference at the expense of the system and eliminates the rule that a conference is allowed for trustees only if hosted by an association related to state retirement systems.

- Allows 10% of system funds to be maintained in cash, up from 1%.



## Retirees Returning as Elected Officials

A MERS retiree who becomes a part-time elected official is not subject to limits on earnings for that elected position. This is a change due to a recent court ruling and a 2019 amendment to R.S. 11:1762A(2). *Sigur v. MERS*, 341 So. 3d 632, writ denied 2022-C-00747 (9/27/22).

## Administrative Rules

Administrative rules codifying the existing practices and policies of MERS were published in the September 2022 issue of the Louisiana Register. These rules are available on the MERS website at [Admin Rules](#).



Mayors Dupree and Grogan were sworn in at the LAPERS Conference

## LAPERS Conference

Trustees for MERS attended an intense educational seminar offered by the Louisiana Association of Public Employees' Retirement Systems (LAPERS) in New Orleans, September 18-20. The seminar provided 13 of the 16 annually required hours of trustee education.

Trustees also had the opportunity to network with trustees and staff from other retirement systems in the State. After taking a two year break for COVID, in person training was enjoyed.



# Employer Information

## Timely Payments

Payments are due on the tenth of each month.

Timely payment of employer and employee contributions to MERS is critical for the financial stability of the retirement system. This also ensures that retirements and refunds are processed in a timely manner with no delay for the member.

Employers are strongly encouraged to sign up for electronic (ACH) payment of contributions to MERS.

When mailing a paper check for contributions, it is not necessary to send a copy of your contribution report. The electronic report you submitted through the Employer Portal is sufficient. Remember when submitting the payroll file, be certain that you receive the confirmation email. This ensures the file was submitted successfully.

## Insurance Deductions

MERS can deduct insurance premiums from retiree checks and remit those funds directly to employers. This option is convenient for both retirees and their former employers.

Retirees must complete the form entitled "Retiree Insurance Premium Deduction Authorization" and employers must file the "Employer Request to Withhold Insurance Premiums" to enroll in this process. All insurance deductions will be remitted to employers via ACH payments.

## GASB 68

GASB 68 reports will be available to employers by February 2023.

## Valuation of Financial Statements

The annual valuation report and financial statements for the fiscal year that ended June 30, 2022, will be presented to the Board of Trustees at its December 15 meeting. Reports will then be posted on [mersla.com](http://mersla.com)

## Conversion of Leave

Employers have the option to adopt the "Conversion of Leave" with MERS for employees retiring. If adopted, all unpaid, unused leave as of the member's termination date will be converted to retirement credit. This conversion is calculated with a cost to be paid by the employer. The member will receive an additional benefit added to their benefit when the system receives the funds from their employer. The adoption of the leave conversion policy is irrevocable.



# Farewell to Susita Suire Congratulations on Your Retirement from MERS!



## Staff Spotlight

MERS couldn't operate without its outstanding staff. We will feature a staff member in each upcoming edition of The Messenger

### Monica Guidry

Monica Guidry is the Senior Accountant and a valuable team member at MERS. With more than 18 years of service, she is the longest serving staff member with MERS.



Monica, a real numbers person, handles benefit payroll, accounts payable, accounts receivable, and contributions.

She is happy to help the staff at municipalities set up electronic payments (ACH) of contributions. These ACH payments simplify the required monthly payments and take the worry out of making sure checks arrive in the mail.

Around the office, Monica is a problem solver who is willing to take on anything! Monica has assisted staff in moving offices and setting up computer equipment. She and Nancy LaGarde, MERS Chief Financial Officer, even take care of feeding the cats and raccoons who visit our courtyard.

## IMPORTANT REMINDERS

### Upcoming Board Meetings

The MERS Board of Trustees meets regularly at 7937 Office Park Boulevard in Baton Rouge. Meetings typically start at 9 a.m. and are open to the public.

Meeting dates, agendas, and minutes are posted on the system's website, [mersla.com](http://mersla.com).

### Address Updates

Retired members should contact MERS if they have moved. Tax forms will be mailed in January, to the address currently on file. Address changes can be made in the Self Service Portal. Alternatively, members may use the form "Retiree/Survivor Update Form."



### MERS Mascots

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