

# BREA Minutes

**Meeting Date and Place:** Tuesday, Dec. 13, 2011; Bldg. 400, Rm RSB 2

**Attendees:** Elliot Auerbach, Carmen Benkovitz, Dave Cox, Eena-Mai Franz, Louise Hanson, Carnal Hobson, Ken Mohring, George Oldham, Arnie Peskin, Sonja Santos, Steve Shapiro, Frances Scheffel, and Richard Skelton

Eena-Mai Franz opened the meeting at 1:05pm.

The minutes of the Nov. 8, 2011 meeting, recorded by Steve Shapiro and prepared by Eena-Mai Franz, were accepted as presented.

Ken Mohring presented a Treasurer's Report. Very little has changed.

## **Old Business:**

SeniorNet: Ronnie Evans was not present. Dave Cox mentioned that he stopped by an open house on his way to the BREA meeting and that the attendance was sparse.

Nominating committee report: Ballots will be counted after this meeting adjourns. Arnie Peskin asked that the results be posted on the BREA website.

BREA newsletter: Mona Rowe was not present.

Membership: Carmen Benkovitz reported that the new and improved membership database should be ready. With help provided by Sheryl Gertzman of ITD, our database program, Microsoft Access, has been updated from the 2002 version, which is no longer supported, to the 2007 version. Sheryl also created a menu page and programming which allows for easy access to and formatting of the information in the database (e.g. in generating lists, labels, etc.). BREA will express its thanks by sending a letter to her supervisor, Tom Schlagel, with a c.c. to her.

E-mail/On-line communication between retirees and BNL: It was decided to table this issue for the time being, and devote BREA's energies to members' concerns over recent changes to retirees' medical benefits.

Retiree organizations at other DOE Labs: Dave Cox reviewed this item for the new people on the Board. He mentioned that he can find no trace of a formal organization of retirees at Argonne, and asked if anyone has ANL contacts who might provide us with information.

DOE former worker medical screening program: Arnie Peskin said that Joe Falco (HR and Occ. Med. Div.) described this program at a recent CAC meeting. There are problems with getting the word out, especially with tracing survivors. Arnie said he has asked HR people in the past to help track down survivors. After the CAC meeting, he spoke with Bob Lincoln (Head of HR) who said there are privacy issues, but agreed that HR staff could try to find and contact survivors if they were given actual names.

BREA tour of RHIC, Nov. 9: Ken Mohring reported that about 15 people came. Lunch arrived late, but other than that, everything went well. Carmen Benkovitz asked if it would be possible to combine the next tour with a BREA meeting.

Changes to retirees' medical benefits: The changes for the year 2012 to retiree medical benefits outlined recently by BNL continues to create a lot of concern within BNL's retiree community. George Oldham and Carnal Hobson attended this BREA meeting to voice their dismay. George said he represents 68 people. Some of them, including him and Carnal, are former Plant Engineering employees who took early retirement when it was offered in 1995. They remember meetings with department supervisors who assured people that if they accepted early retirement, they would not have to pay for medical coverage, ever. (BNL plans to charge all retirees in 2012.) In addition, George said that some of BNL's oldest retirees, in their 90's, have very small incomes and cannot afford the \$1000 plus per year per couple that they will now be required by the Lab to pay to maintain their coverage.

There was also a discussion of a letter to retirees from Bob Lincoln dated Dec. 6, 2011. The letter does outline a claim procedure and quotes from old benefit booklets dating back to 1954. However, people at the meeting voiced unhappiness with what has been perceived as stonewalling on the part of HR when they asked to see documents relating to past retirement policies, letters or memos that persuaded employees to take early retirement offers, or indeed, documents in one's own personnel file. The problem for the vast majority of retirees who are under the impression that they were exempt from any payments for medical coverage during their lifetime is that they have not kept the relevant paperwork. However, such paperwork did exist, because Dave Cox has received copies of documents from retirees who did keep their retirement records. Dave also read aloud sections of an ERISA (Employee Retirement Income Security Act) article which he will email to anyone who would like a copy. Elliot Auerbach encouraged BREA to hire a lawyer to clarify several issues. George Oldham said he would get back to the people he represents and ask them to look for relevant documents. It was also decided that Eena-Mai Franz would email Bob Lincoln with a request to look at old BNL policy manuals.

### **New Business:**

Consumer Price Index (CPI): Elliot Auerbach made a short presentation describing CPI's (there is more than one) and how they are presently calculated by the US Gov't. Social Security cost-of-living adjustments are currently based on the "general" CPI, which some economists argue underestimates the cost of living for Seniors, especially as medical costs increase. Medical costs are not factored in, and when medical costs rise for people on fixed incomes, they spend less on the commodities that are part of the formula. The Gov't is planning to change the CPI used for Seniors, hopefully these changes will be positive. An article on this subject appeared in the New York Times several months ago.

Arnie Peskin asked for a vote of thanks for Eena-Mai Franz, for her service as BREA President these last two years.

After the meeting was officially adjourned at 2:25pm, the ballots were counted by Elliot Auerbach, Eena-Mai Franz and Arnie Peskin. The results were unanimous. The BREA officers for 2012-2013 are Dave Cox, President; Ken Mohring, Vice President; Louise Hanson, Secretary; and Steve Shapiro, Treasurer.

Jan. 2012 meeting: Tues, Jan. 10, 1pm, Bldg. 400, Rm RSB 2

Feb. 2012 meeting: Tues, Feb.14, 1pm, Bldg. 400, Rm RSB 2

Minutes submitted by Louise Hanson