



University of Iowa Retirees Association

A History of the UIRA:
1995-2015

by **Jean Hood**

with editing & design by **Kenneth Starck**

and assistance from **Jennifer Dybicz**



Kathie Belgium (2001-02) displays a t-shirt from 1999 when the UIRA served as host to the annual meeting of the Big Ten Retirees Association.

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*This is the time to remember
Cause it will not last forever*
--Billy Joel

EDITOR'S NOTE: This brief history of UIRA has been in the making for some time. **Jean Hood** has been compiling the history since her presidency, 2010-11. Now seemed to be the time to unveil it. There also is a report by UIRA Intern **Jennifer Dybicz** of a meeting of past UIRA presidents held, appropriately, on the nation's Presidents Day February 16, 2015

--**Kenneth Starck**—UIRA President, 2014-15

Iowa City, IA
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UIRA website: <http://uira.org.uiowa.edu/>



University of Iowa Retirees Association

A HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA RETIREES ASSOCIATION

by Jean Hood

With encouragement from the UI Alumni Association, the idea of a retirees organization was first explored. Then it was put on hold when President **Hunter Rawlings** (UI president, 1988-95) launched the annual retirees reception.

The question was reopened in the early 1990s. A committee of selected faculty was formed to be a “steering committee” to explore the idea of a retirees group. They defined the purposes of a retirees group as (1) social/recreational; (2) dissemination of information about financial and health programs; (3) support for the University of Iowa; and (4) other interests.

The group’s first task was to formally organize a Retirees Committee, later known as the Board of Directors. In the period 1995 to 1996, **Arthur Canter** became the first president to serve a term of one year.

Other members of this initial group included **Joan Cantor**, president-elect for one year, then president (1996-97) for one year; **Frank Cheng** (3 years); **Charles Davidson** (1 year.); **Margery Hoppin**, treasurer (3 years.); **Betty Remington** (2 years); **Robert Sodolfsky** (4 years); **Gordon Strayer** (1 year.); **Jan Wilcox**, secretary (4 years); **Rosemary Sippy** (1 year); and **Pete Knapp** (2 years).

The University of Iowa Foundation Representative was **Olga Sassine** who offered strong encouragement to the group. She indicated the Foundation wanted to be supportive. An anonymous gift of \$1,000 was given to the group to support its

organizing efforts. The Foundation also gave support by sending out some of the mailings, helping with meetings and keeping a member mailing list up to date of those who had retired recently from The University of Iowa. **Sam Becker** (1998-99) was instrumental in getting the support of the administration, and the group received a small grant from President

Early decision: include all retired University faculty and staff.

Rawlings. At the insistence of **Arthur Canter** (1995-96) the group was inclusive of all retired University faculty and staff. One of the group's first tasks was to develop bylaws.

The group immediately began participating in the Big 10 Retirees Association with **Frank Cheng** and **Robert Sodolfsky** attending the meeting in 1995 at Michigan State University. They brought back a report and ideas from the group. It became evident that the structure of the retiree groups varied among the Big Ten institutions, each accommodating local circumstances.

A survey of members was designed and mailed to all recent UI retirees. Returns numbered 326. Only 25 indicated no interest—many of these indicating that they were declining because of poor health or moving out of town. Ninety-five said they were interested in being active right away.

The first program was held on Wednesday, October 18, 1995, at the Pappajohn Business Administration Building. **Richard Saunders** of UI's Human Resources spoke on health insurance and related benefit matters. A tour of the building preceded the meeting.

The group discussed the need for a newsletter. **Gordon Strayer** became the first editor. It was to be called the Golden Hawk, but the group was asked not to use that name since it was too close to some of the symbols of the U of I athletics department. The name *The Gray Hawk* emerged.

As a source of income, dues were established—\$10—the same amount collected today (2015)! On November 16, 1995, there were 265 dues paying members. That was the same month that a letterhead for the group was designed and printed.

In 1996 an attempt by UIRA to be represented on the University's Funded Retirement and Insurance Committee (FRIC) failed. The meetings are open, however, and a UIRA Board member attends as an observer and reports to the UIRA Board. Meanwhile, University Human Resources provides periodic programs about changes in health insurance issues.

Should the group become incorporated? **Margery Hoppin** talked with **William Phelan**, an attorney, who believed that a social organization such as UIRA is tax-exempt. Hence, no need to incorporate. Some effort was made to do this, however, and a copy of the material assembled is in the UIRA's archives housed at the University of Iowa Libraries' Archives.

On June 12, 1996, the first annual picnic was held. Traditionally, members bring a dish to share with chicken and drink being furnished. This tradition still exists.

In 1997, there were 363 paid reservations for the annual dinner held in September. In that year, **Sam Becker** (1998-99) set up a meeting with President **Mary Sue Coleman** to discuss ways in which retirees could contribute and benefit the University. She suggested:

1. Participate in Liberal Arts Freshman Seminars
2. Help with capital campaigns
3. Serve as dissertation readers
4. Work in the undergraduate advising office
5. Lobby Friends of UI Network
6. Keep updated about the university

***Mary Sue Coleman:
how retirees can
serve the University.***

In 1998, a request was made for UIRA members to host a visitor's desk on the first floor of the Levitt Center so people would know where to go if they came in the first floor level. UIRA had 495 members that year, and several volunteered for this project.

In 1999 the Executive Committee formally became the Executive Board.

During **Harold Engen's** term as president (1997-98), discussions were held to form a senior college. Some people felt this would interfere with Senior Center programming and should not be done. The Emeritus Faculty Council (EFC) felt the idea

should either go further or be scrapped. **Albert Hood**, then a new member of the EFC, agreed to form a committee to explore the idea which he continued during his tenure as EFC president. Involved in the initial development of the Senior College were **Hood** as chair, **David Vernon**, **Dick Dustin**, **Judy Hendershot**, **Marilyn Holland**, **Jean Kendall**, **Hermine McLeran**, **Bill Oglesby** and **Lee Shope** (2000-01). Large Senior College enrollments over the years have underscored the success of this venture. The Senior College, which offers low-cost, short-term courses open to any retired person, operates in association with the Emeritus Faculty Association and the UIRA with support from the UI Alumni Association.

When the Carver-Hawkeye Arena at the University was opened, there were no rails going down into the arena. UIRA requested that railings be put in, which was accomplished.

As members of the Big 10 Retirees Association, UIRA members have hosted the group twice—once in August 1999 and a second time under the leadership of **Sara Wolfson** (2005-06) in August 2009. The organizing group received \$2,500 from the Provost's office to help with expenses as the Emeritus Faculty Council share. UIRA had been saving up and had a reserve of \$10,000-\$11,000 to help with the event. The meeting was extremely successful and stayed well within budget. UI President **Sally Mason** welcomed the group. In her remarks she discussed challenges faced by the UI following the flood of 2008. Later **Rod Lehnertz**, UI's director of planning and construction, showed slides of the flood's destruction and led a bus tour of the campus.

UIRA has hosted Big Ten Retirees Association twice—1999 and 2009.

The 1999 hosting featured presentations by a number of UI leaders, including Provost **Jon Whitmore**, Vice President for Research **David Skorton** and President Emeritus **Willard (Sandy) Boyd**. A special treat was a visit to the Amana Colonies and the home of **Larry Rettig** with dinner at the Ox Yoke Inn and a lecture on the history of the colonies by **Rettig**.

In 2005, under **Dick Gibson's** leadership (2004-05), the calendar and budget years for UIRA were reorganized to coincide with the University's calendar and budget year. A party was held honoring **Arthur Canter** (1995-96) who was applauded for his insistence that all retirees of the university—staff and faculty—be included in UIRA.

During **Sara Wolfson's** tenure (2005-06), changes were made informing people about how to pay their dues. **Ken Yerington** became archivist, retiring from that position in 2014.

In 2007, under **Karole Fuller's** (2006-07) direction, the annual benefits meeting was videotaped and replayed several times on the University's station. During that time, the Board decided to offer to new members a one-year free membership plus subscription to *The Gray Hawk* newsletter.

David Thayer (2008-09) directed a survey of members in spring 2008. Survey results provided ideas to the program committee. Interest groups were proposed, and some met about a particular topic. The memoirs group was formed and is still meeting today (2015). The group has published a book of selected memoirs, *Yesterdays: Memoirs from the Gray Hawk Writers*, **Allen Brody**, ed., 2014.

Dick Stevenson (2008-09) identified a group of volunteers to receive the newsletter electronically. This proved successful, resulting in considerable savings in money and paper. The practice later was offered to all members. By 2015, almost all members were receiving the monthly newsletter electronically.

*Efforts to disband
Senior College resisted.*

Penny Hall's tenure (2009-10) brought permission for the Board to meet and vote electronically when a decision was urgent. Efforts to disband the Senior College and incorporate it into the Center on Aging were opposed successfully. The Senior College Committee continues to be in charge of the program. This was also the year that the group's archives were moved from a bottom file drawer in the Provost's office to the University of Iowa Libraries' Archives. **Feather Lacy** updated the website and became

webmaster in April 2009, a position in which she continues to serve the UIRA today.

During **Jean Hood's** tenure (2010-11), a study committee was appointed to examine problems related to having the UI Foundation keep UIRA membership lists. An assistant to the treasurer position was established to collect dues.

*Gaining control of data
base of membership.*

Gene Spaziani, who was chair of membership, developed a spreadsheet with information about members. This eliminated the confidentiality problems when information was recorded by the Foundation. Finally, UIRA could have its own data base of membership. A hospitality committee was established to greet people as they come to meetings and encourage people to wear nametags. Operations Manuals were compiled for all Board members.

Ken Kuntz served as president 2011-12. Initial inquiries into merging the Emeritus Faculty Council and UIRA began. The Big Ten meeting was held at the University of Wisconsin.

Nancy Williams, president in 2012-13, met extensively with members of the Emeritus Faculty Council to

*UI President Mason
Hosts Reception to
Launch 2012-13.*

explore the idea of merging with UIRA. After many hours of meetings, the EFC voted to keep its organization separate. Launching the year's first

UIRA program was a reception and presentation for members by UI President **Sally Mason** at the Levitt Center. **Carol Fethke** and **Nancy Williams** met with **Brian Kaskie** of the College of Public Health faculty to discuss how the university could be pushed toward a stronger retirement model. A brochure was developed describing UIRA to future members by **Ken Starck** (2014-15). Ideas began to emerge to have a Health Fair for members with Board member **Nancy Lynch** leading much of the effort.

During **Rick Walton's** presidency (2013-14), the Board decided to begin delivering *The Gray Hawk* only electronically,

though exception was made for about two dozen members who preferred receiving paper copies via the postal service. This has resulted in large money and paper savings. **Dick Johns** looked into possible electronic-online membership management, but the expense at this time was deemed prohibitive. President-elect **Ken Starck** (2014-15) initiated the UIRA Travel Photo Contest with all entries being displayed at the annual meeting. A UI student, **Jennifer Dybicz**, became UIRA's first intern.

Ken Starck's presidency (2014-15) ushered in the 20th anniversary of the founding of UIRA. The Travel Photo Contest continued with financial

*Awards established
for Community,
University service.*

support from Hills Bank and Trust Company. Initiated was a program of UIRA awards, annually recognizing two members who have made extraordinary contributions of service—one to the University and another to the Community. The year's first honorees were **Nancy Lynch**, Community, and **Albert Hood**, University. A meeting of past UIRA presidents was held February 16 to review UIRA's history. **Jean Hood** (2010-11), who in the fall of 2014 became UIRA archivist, replacing **Ken Yerington**, prepared this history of the UIRA

Over the years, the bylaws have been revised. In 2010-11, for example, the term of secretary was changed from one year to three years. The position of assistant to the treasurer was established in 2011.

Now, as the UIRA grows out of its teen-age years, the association continues to be a vibrant organization looking after its members' welfare and interests and offering opportunities for UI retirees to remain active and connected to the University and community. It is a legacy UIRA's past leaders can take pride in and future leaders can build upon.

Number of Members through the Years

1995-96—324; **1996-97**—363; **1997-98**—497; **1998-99**—512;
1999-00—634; **2000-01**—647; **2001-02**—744; **2002-03**—716;
2003-04—750; **2004-05**— ? ; **2005-06**—738; **2006-07**—740;
2007-08— ? ; **2008-09**—602; **2009-10**—568; **2010-11**—568;
2011-12—649; **2012-13**—611; **2013-14**—579; **2014-15**—575

PAST PRESIDENTS OF UIRA

- 1995-96—**Arthur Canter** (Psychiatry)
1996-97—**Joan Cantor** (Psychology)
1997-98—**Harold Engen** (Counselor Education)
1998-99—**Sam Becker** (Communication Studies)
1999-00—**Jim Clifton** (Medicine)
2000-01—**Lee Shope** (Information Technology)
2001-02—**Kathie Belgum** (Law)
2002-03—**Eleanor Anstey** (Social Work)
2003-04—**Beatrice Furner** (Education)
2004-05—**Richard Gibson** (Facilities Services)
2005-06—**Sara C. Wolfson** (Education)
2006-07—**Karole Fuller** (Natural History Museum)
2007-08—**David Thayer** (Theatre Arts)
2008-09—**Richard Stevenson** (College of Business)
2009-10—**Penny Hall** (Speech Pathology & Audiology)
2010-11—**Jean Hood** (Iowa State U Ext. Services)
2011-12—**J. Kenneth Kuntz** (Religious Studies)
2012-13—**Nancy Williams** (Office of the Provost)
2013-14—**Rick Walton** (Dentistry)
2014-15—**Kenneth Starck** (Journalism & Mass Comm)

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Past Presidents Recall Some of that Past

by Jennifer Dybicz, UIRA Intern

The country may have been celebrating Presidents Day, but the UIRA had its own presidents day February 16 when nine past presidents, the current president and the president-elect of the association gathered in the Iowa City Public Library to talk about the 20 years since the founding of the UIRA. It was fitting that **Arthur Canter** (1995-96) began the discussion. He was UIRA's first president. He recalled establishing the organization, along with others, including **Sam Becker** (1998-99). **Canter** and **Becker** had been friends since their freshman year at UI.

When he retired in 1986, **Canter** had the idea of retirees becoming ambassadors of the university. He was asked to form a steering committee and was appointed chair. **Canter's** biggest concern, he said, was that he didn't want an organization for emeritus faculty only.

"I only wanted to continue if we could include any (retired) employee of the University," he said. This included faculty and staff retirees. Similar organizations at other campuses, including Illinois and Purdue, were reviewed. Questionnaires were used to assess member needs. More than 300 replies were received. By-laws were created.

While **Canter** shared his story, other past presidents chimed in with memories of their own. **Jean Hood** (2010-11), who had been researching UIRA's history, agreed with **Canter** that **Olga Sassine** played a huge role in launching UIRA. "She greeted everyone. She knew everyone's name," said **Hood**.

Fun Fact: When UIRA began in 1995, membership dues were \$10—they're the same 20 years later!

Nancy Williams (2012-13) said she wished the university would have continued to support the association as it had at the outset.

Membership was a topic of keen interest among the past presidents. "The challenge is getting new retirees involved," said **Williams**. "We have held steady with around 600 members since the beginning." **Lee Shope** (2000-01) agreed, indicating it would be ideal to have every UI retiree as a member.

While the UIRA has enjoyed much success in its 20 years, the past presidents agreed there's room for improvement. For example, UIRA could be doing more for its members. It was noted that the UIRA has been making efforts to increase membership, member engagement and member benefits. The association recently introduced Special Interest Groups. This year UIRA is initiating a program to recognize member contributions to the community and university: a Community Service Award and a University Service Award.

The past presidents shared memories of accomplishments. **Shope** and **Hood** agreed that the annual program on health benefits is UIRA's most successful meeting. The program began to be televised in 2008. **Hood** also referred to the request for handrails in Carver-Hawkeye Arena, the UIRA listserv and maintaining archives. **Penny Hall** (2009-10) mentioned the volunteer hours that UIRA has given the university.

Beatrice Furner (2003-04) said she was pleased to be able to offer quality programs for members and monitor such benefits for retirees as health care. **Sara Wolfson** (2005-2006) agreed that popular programs and the ability to stay within budget were major accomplishments.

Fun Fact: *When UIRA sought a name for its newsletter, Gordon Strayer wrote that one name that would NOT be considered was Geezer Gazette.*

At the top of **Penny Hall's** (2009-10) memories was "saving Senior College." During her term, the issue sprang up suddenly with a similar educational program, the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute. After much discussion with Emeritus Faculty Council officers and meetings of the UIRA Board, the decision of both groups was that the Senior College should remain a separate organization. For the UIRA, this was based on the fact that the Senior College was a well-established, well-organized, well-attended and well-respected program of short-term courses that justified its continuation as an independent group. Today the Senior College continues to enjoy enormous success.

Several past presidents shared their memories in response to an email questionnaire.

Eleanor Anstey (2002-03) said her main accomplishment as president was when UIRA took her suggestion of setting aside money each year to be able to host the annual Big Ten Retirees Association Conference, which has met in Iowa City twice, in 1999 and 2009. Big Ten university retiree associations meet each summer with the host site rotating among the institutions.

Rick Walton (2013-14) cited operational changes during his UIRA presidency. This included creative membership dues, online membership application, an electronic newsletter and identifying membership perks.

As the past presidents' meeting came to a close, there was agreement that the best memory was the camaraderie among members. Through UIRA, retirees meet and interact with peers they might not have encountered otherwise, at the same time maintaining a connection to the university. They noted the positive spirit of Board members over the years, noting that the service is strictly voluntary.

UIRA's membership is as diverse as that of the university, and this is reflected in the past presidents. The 20 come from 20 different academic units.

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THE BIG TEN RETIREES ASSOCIATION

UIRA is a member of the Big Ten Retirees Association. The Big Ten website is maintained by and at the University of Michigan: <http://www.hr.umich.edu/umra/big10/>

Big Ten Retirees Association Directory

University of Illinois

Indiana University

University of Iowa

University of Michigan

Michigan State University

University of Minnesota

University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Northwestern University

Ohio State University

Penn State University

Purdue University

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

University of Wisconsin

UIRA'S Board of Directors—2014-15

(year term on Board expires)



University of Iowa Retirees Association

Kenneth Starck President (2016)

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Beverly Robalino President-Elect (2017)

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Alice Atkinson Secretary (2017)

Kris Canfield Treasurer (2016)

Rick Walton Past President (2015)

E. Ann Ford *Gray Hawk* Editor pro tem

Jean Hood Archivist

Katharine Bjorndal Director (2015)

Richard Borchard Director (2017)

Richard Johns Director (2016)

Nancy Lynch Director (2015)

Gene Spaziani Director (2016)

Pam Willard Director (2017)

*All members of the UIRA Board of Directors
and its officers are volunteers.*

Past Presidents Meeting

Nine past presidents, the current president and president-elect of UIRA met February 16, 2015, in the Iowa City Public Library to review the association's history. **Arthur Canter** (below right) told about the early years, having served as first president. Below left: Intern **Jennifer Dybicz**, is shown with **Lee Shope** (2000-01).



Taking part in the past presidents' gathering were (from left): **Beatrice Furner** (2003-04), **Nancy Williams** (2012-13), **Arthur Canter** (1995-96), **Kathie Belgum** (2001-02), **Beverly Robalino** (2015-16 president-elect), **Penny Hall** (2009-10), **Jean Hood** (2010-11), **Sara Wolfson** (2005-06) and **David Thayer** (2007-08).



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