

For Retired Club Members



# The Best Years

## City Retiree Associations:

### DWP Retirees Association



**Dolores Foley, President**  
Phone: (626) 445-7376  
E-mail: vinmar@altrionet.com

### Los Angeles Retired Fire and Police Association



**Robin J. Welborn, President**  
Phone: (323) 283-4441  
Fax: (626) 285-1461  
E-mail: larfpa@pacbell.net or  
9521 Las Tunas Dr. #4,  
Temple City, CA 91780

### Retired Los Angeles City Employees, Inc. (RLACEI)



**Ed Harding, RLACEI President**  
www.rlacei.com  
Contact him: (800) 678-4145 Ext. 703  
or via E-mail:  
postmaster@rlacei.com

### Change of Address?

If you change your address, notify Helen Salgado, Membership Chair, at (800) 678-4145 Ext. 713, or write to her at 8372 Arnett Dr. Huntington Beach, CA 92647. Also notify LACERS.

### Have News About Yourself?

Contact Phil Skarin, 5301 Norwich Ave., Van Nuys, CA 91411-3910, or call (800) 678-4145 Ext. 709.

## Upcoming Events:

**April 10:** Membership Meeting at the Van Nuys/Sherman Oaks Senior Center, 1 p.m.; lunch at noon if you have made reservation.

**June 4:** Retirees Golf Classic, Alhambra Golf Course.

## RLACEI:

# Will LACERS Buy A New Building?



By Phil Skarin,  
RLACEI Publicity Chair

### President Ed Harding reports:



Ed Harding

"I want to congratulate Beth Bedsole on her appointment as the new editor of *El Pueblo*, and her editorial assistant, Chris Edling. I have met them, and I am sure they will do a great job.

"I am entering my 14th year as President of the Retired L. A. City Employees, Inc., and I have enjoyed every

minute of the past 13 years. Working with all of our very capable Directors has made my job an easy one.

"Vernon Sipes, a retired Superintendent of Street Maintenance and a very good friend, had a stroke on Christmas Eve and died Jan. 5. Vern was 68, with 31 years of City service, and was a Vietnam Vet. He was buried at the Riverside National Cemetery Jan. 10.

"I wish to congratulate my step-grandson, Tom McLurkin Jr., Deputy City Attorney, for his promotion to the U.S. Army

Reserve: "The Commanding General of the Army will change command of the 75th Legal Support Organization to Full Bird Col. Tom McLurkin, Jr., on Jan. 20 at Moffet Federal Airfield."

"I hope everyone had as nice of a Christmas and New Year's Day as Martha and I had. We spent this time in our new second home in Nevada. It snowed three days while we were there, my First White Christmas."

### Legislative Update:



Ken Spiker

Ken Spiker, our elected Commissioner to the LACERS Board of Directors, reports that the State Supreme Court has agreed to hear the case of six members of the San Diego Retirement

Board, who are charged with violating state conflict of interest laws.

The six San Diego Board members had voted for a plan that allowed the city to put less money into the retirement system than required. In exchange, the city boasted retirement benefits for city workers. Prosecutors stated that the deal led to a \$1 billion benefit deficit.

If the Supreme Court does not change the appeals court decision, retirement boards, which are required to have employees and retirees sit on their board by law, would be unable to function properly. LACERS would be one system affected.

Two-dozen retirement systems, including LACERS, requested the Supreme Court to hear the case, which currently affects state employees, public school teachers and numerous other retirement systems.

We all are hoping the court renders a decision early this year.

### Building Search

For years, Board members of LACERS

and the Fire and Police pensions departments have been looking for new or different office space.

Committee members, with the help of a prominent real estate company, have searched for a building downtown to rent or buy. Also, they are also considering buying space to build a new building.

Currently on the list to buy is the Times Mirror Building on the corner of First Street and Spring. Tours of the building have been conducted for Board members and staff of both departments.

When the committee is finished with their search, they will present their recommendation to both Boards.

I personally would prefer building our own building to meet the needs of both departments, with extra space to rent to other City departments. I believe we could offer better rental rates than the City is now paying other City departments. I believe we could offer better rental rates than the City is now paying. Other City departments would be permanent tenants and would help pay off the cost of the new building.

### Richman Initiative:

Proponents of the Public Employees Benefits Reform Act, also known as the Richman Initiative, had until Jan. 15 to gather enough signatures on petitions to qualify it for the ballot. If it passes, it will

require substantial changes and reductions in pensions and benefits for future retirees. Stay tuned.

### State Costs:

The Public Employee Post-Employment Benefits Commission, created by the governor, has reported that the costs of retiree health-care benefits for both state and local governments would be about \$118 billion over the next 30 years and that money should be set aside now to fulfill the promised benefits. But the benefits are justified, the report concluded.

### LACERS Statistics:

Here are the current financial statistics:  
Total value of the fund (close of business Nov. 30, 2007): **\$11,508,220,000**  
Retiree checks issued monthly (as of Dec. 31, 2007): **15,151**  
Average retiree monthly allowance (as of Dec. 31, 2007): \$2,698.70  
Surviving spouses receiving an allowance (as of Dec 31, 2007): **3,224**  
Average surviving spouses' monthly allowance (as of Dec. 31, 2007): **\$1,558.77**  
Average retiree age (as of Dec. 31, 2007): **71.78**  
Average number of years served (including buyback; service retirement only): **27.37**

### RLACEI Website

Hal Danowitz asks you to visit the RLACEI Website at [www.rlacei.com](http://www.rlacei.com) to find the latest retirement news. If you find it helpful, or have suggestions for improvement, call Hal at (800) 678-4145 Ext. 707.

### Contact LACERS

The Los Angeles City Employees Retirement System is at 360 E. Second Street, second floor, Los Angeles, CA 90012. Phone (213) 473-7200 or (800) 779-8328. Contact them to arrange direct deposit of your retirement checks, change your tax withholding or beneficiary, or for questions about your health plans.

# The Best Years

## ADVENTURES with HAL!



By Hal Danowitz,  
Secretary, RLACEI

### Retiree Hotlines

Who to call? Following is a list of contacts for RLACEI and for the DWP:

**City Employees Retirement System:** (213) 473-7200

**RLACEI Retirement Counselors and Retiree Helplines: (800) 678-4145**

• Edward Harding	Ext. 703
• Phil Skarin	Ext. 709
• Robert Wilkinson	Ext. 704
• Jerry Bardwell	Ext. 706
• Harold Danowitz	Ext. 707
• Jack Mathews	Ext. 712
• Helen Salgado (membership)	Ext. 713
• Americo Garza	Ext. 710
• Neil Ricci	Ext. 714

**DWP Retirement Plan Office:** (213) 367-1722

### RLACEI:

#### Officers for 2008

Edward Harding, President  
Robert Wilkinson, First Vice President  
Kenneth Spiker, Second Vice President  
Hal Danowitz, Secretary  
Jerry Bardwell, Treasurer

#### Committee Chairpersons for 2008

Bob Wilkinson, Audit  
Jerry Bardwell, Budget  
Hal Danowitz, Bylaws  
Ken Spiker, Legal and Legislative  
Helen Salgado, Membership  
Phil Skarin, Publicity  
Tom Stemnock and Phil Skarin, Golf  
Americo Garza, Picnic  
Americo Garza, Holiday Party and Installation  
Jack Mathews, Senior Citizens  
Neil Ricci, Health  
Neil Ricci, Nominating  
Phil Skarin, Parliamentarian

#### Directors

Thomas Stemnock  
Americo Garza  
Helen Salgado  
Phil Skarin  
Dave Wilkins  
Jack Mathews  
Neil Ricci



## Next Stop: Botswana

■ Hal and entourage continue their African safari adventure.

On May 16 we were picked up at the Cape Grace Hotel at 5 a.m. for our South African Air flight to Johannesburg, where we were to connect to our flight to Maun, Botswana. Our tickets said we were to be on Air Botswana, but when we started to board the aircraft I noticed that the name of the airline was Intensive Air, which did little to abate our nervousness. We also had to identify our luggage on the tarmac before we could board the plane. All in all, the flight to Maun was uneventful and we landed about noon.

Botswana, formerly Bechuanaland, is a landlocked south African country, boarded by Zambia on the north, Zimbabwe on the east, Namibia on the west, and South Africa on the south. A long-neglected British protectorate, it achieved its independence under democratic rule in 1966 and soon after discovered three of the world's richest diamond-bearing formations. It enjoys a stable government and has high health, educational and economic standards. However, it is largely a wilderness of vast spaces – savanna, desert, wetlands and salt pans with few roads. It has a population of 1.5 million and the official languages are English and Tswana.

After we passed through immigration and customs, we were met by a representative of Wilderness Safaris. This is where the feared "weighing of the bags" was to take place. We were limited to 26 pounds each, and that included our cameras, so I'm sure that we were all over the limit. The weigh-in was conducted without a problem, and we were ready to board our flight to Mombo Camp -- situated in northern Botswana on the northern tip of Chief's Island within the Moremi Game Reserve in the Okavango Delta -- for a three-night stay. This would be the first of five small planes that we would take between

camps. Our first plane was a Cessna Caravan, which seats 12 passengers. The plane was full, and our flight to Mombo was only about 30 minutes. The plane flew at about 5,500 feet, but because the elevation in the area is about 3,500 feet we had a great view of the landscape and did see some animals along the way. We landed on a small dirt airfield and were met by our guide, Okwa, in a large Land Rover, which had three tiers of seats behind the driver.

The drive to the camp took about 20 minutes, along narrow dirt and sometimes very sandy roads. These roads were originally trails the animals used to get to water or grazing areas, and they continue to be used by the animals today. This area is part of the Kalahari Desert, and even though it is a delta area with lots of water, the desert sand is just below the surface. There were lots of acacia trees, palms, and some hardwood, but this is not a jungle; in fact it is a lot like the high deserts of California. On the ride to the camp we saw families of warthogs, and just before we reached the camp we saw our first giraffe standing by the side of the road, eating leaves from the top of a tree. We knew we were starting to see the Africa that we had hoped for.

The staff of the camp came out to greet us, and we were taken to a large lounge area and offered refreshments while we were given an overview of the camp and our activities. We also had to sign a hold-harmless waiver in case we were eaten by a lion, or some other bad thing happened.

Camp Mombo has nine tented rooms built on teak walkways and platforms above ground. Rooms are superbly furnished, with a large king-size bed, seating area, and a bathroom with double sinks and showers. There was a large veranda overlooking the open plain in front of the camp, with a large day bed for watching the animals, and an outdoor shower. As we freshened up, I looked out over the plain and could see a number of



The type of plane we used to fly from camp to camp.



Cape buffalo walking through the water. I later found out that five of the buffalo lived in the camp under the tent next to ours.

The common areas of the camp included the dining room, pub, a lounge area, a bema (a seating area around a large fire pit), a deck and plunge pool. The schedule for our activities at Mombo, and this would be almost the same for the rest of the camps, was a wake up call at 6 a.m., a light breakfast and then a game drive until about 11 a.m. (we would stop about 9:30 a.m. for snack). At noon we would have a large brunch and then a chance to relax until about 3 p.m., when tea would be served, which included a light snack to hold you until dinner. We left for our evening game drive about 3:30 p.m. and, after stopping for sundowner cocktails, we returned about a half-hour after sunset. At our next two camps we were allowed to stay out later after dark, when you can see the nocturnal animals. We returned to the camp between 7 and 7:30 p.m. and had time to clean up before cocktails and dinner. The food at all of our camps was outstanding, even though the cooks were natives who did not eat this type of food and had never been to formal cooking school. The food was mostly Continental, leaning toward English, but with the use of local products and produce. We had game two or three times, and it was always some type of antelope.

The weather had been what we expected – in the low 80s during the day and into the 50s



A lioness waiting to hunt.



# ADVENTURES with HAL!



Stopping for Sundowner.



More Sundowners.

at night. On the evening drives we had large ponchos, which helped keep us warm. During the day we were allowed to walk around the camp, but after dark we needed to be escorted by staff anytime we left our tent or when we returned to our tent after dinner. Because Mombo is in a national reserve, the guides do not carry weapons, but in all the other camps they were armed and carry the weapons even in the camp.

Our first game drive was very exciting as we were seeing the animals for the first time. I'm ashamed to admit that after a while we became very selective in what we wanted to see, but at that point it was all new. We saw large herds of impala, wildebeest, zebra, giraffe and troops of baboons. Of course what we wanted to see were the big five: elephants, lions, leopards, hippopotami and rhinoceroses. We stopped for our sundowner cocktails at a hippo pool and saw one of hippos walking into the pool; we didn't know it then, but is very rare to see a hippo out of the water except at night. We saw our first lioness getting ready to begin her evening hunt for food. We parked about 30 feet from her and she never even looked at us. Our guide told us there had been no hunting in this area for more than 15 years, so the animals were not afraid of humans. They were used to the Land Rovers, too; as long as we stayed in the vehicle, we would be fine. After watching the lioness for a while, we got a call over the radio that a leopard was near. It was getting dark, but the chance to see a leopard was too good to pass up, and we started cross-country to see if we could spot it. We reached the location and were able to see it as it was hunting an impala. Dusk was falling fast and it

was hard to see the animal, but when I looked at my videotape I could see it clearly. While we were sitting there something must have startled the leopard because it ran directly under our vehicle, something the guides had never seen before. We returned to camp satisfied that we had a good game drive.

Before dinner, the camp staff put on a show of native dancing, and after our dinner we sat around the bema with the other guests and enjoyed an after-dinner drink and listened to the night sounds of the delta while looking at a star-filled sky. We were escorted to our tent and got ready for bed. As I put my feet under the covers I felt something soft and warm, and I figured I was about to be done in, until I discovered it was a hot water bottle to help cut the night chill. We laid in bed that first night listening to the sound of the animals, which never seemed to stop.

On our morning game drive, we all noticed the smell of wild sage that was always in the air. This morning we saw our first bull elephant; this would be the only one we would see in this area, as the annual migration from the north had not yet begun. But because it was our first elephant we took an awful lot of pictures. Little did we know that we would see large breeding herd at our next camp. We were able to get out of the vehicle and do a short nature walk with our guide. He gave us instructions on what to do if we were charged by an animal – the number one rule was not to panic, and number two was to get out of the guides' way if he needed to run (only kidding!). We saw many different types of plants; the natives use many for medical and other needs. We also were given a course in animal droppings (dung),

which was in endless supply. On the way back to camp we spotted a female cheetah with two cubs. We were able to get very close to them and watch for about 45 minutes, as the cubs played and the female kept a watchful eye and surveyed the area.

On our afternoon drive, we came upon a pride of lions that was just finishing eating a Cape buffalo. The lions were all full, with their bellies extended, and lying in the tall grass. The males were taking turns in guarding the kill from about 100 vultures that were just waiting for their turn in the trees above. There was not much left of the buffalo, except for its rib cage and its skin and hoofs. We saw the cheetah family again and stopped at a hyena den, where we saw on female hyena that was babysitting three cubs.

In addition to all of the animals, there were many species of birds our guide pointed out to us as we drove around the bush. Northern Botswana has more than 500 different species and subspecies of birds. We met guests at Mombo who came to the area just to see the birds.

We were leaving for our next camp on the morning of May 19, so we decided to sleep in and have a relaxing morning sitting on the veranda, watching the animals in front of the camp. It was my birthday, and the staff surprised me at brunch with a card and a bottle of champagne. After brunch we took the short drive to the airstrip to catch our flight to Duma Tau, our next camp. Our plane was another Cessna Caravan, and the short flight was just as uneventful as we hoped for.

Duma Tau is located within the Linyanti Reserve, which is bordered on the north by the Linyanti River and to the east by the Chobe



Our cabin at Camp Mombo.

National Park. The Linyanti River is the boundary between Botswana and Namibia. We were picked up at the airfield by our guide, Peace, and his tracker, Rock, in an open Land Rover. It was about a half-hour drive to the camp, and along the way we had to stop to allow a large herd of elephants to cross the road.

The camp has nine tented rooms on a raised deck, with many of the same amenities as Mombo, but not quite as luxurious. While the tents and common areas were raised off the ground because of the number of elephants and other animals that make their home within the camp. "Norman," the resident elephant, was always around the camp, and we made sure to check his location before we left our tents. After dark our guides, who were armed, walked us to our tents.

The staff at Mombo must have called the staff at Duma Tau and told them it was my birthday, because in our tent was a gift of a book on the Chobe National Park. We also had more champagne on our afternoon game drive. Because this was a private reserve, we were able to continue our afternoon drive until well after dark. Using a white light, we were able to see the nocturnal animals. Before we drove back to camp for dinner, we followed a female lion along the road. The tracker was shining the light directly into the lion's eyes, but it did not seem to bother the animal. At our next camp, they used a red light, because they said the white light bothered the animals. It seemed to us that nothing bothered the animals, except those higher up on the food chain.

We spent three nights at Camp Duma Tau and had game drives each morning and evening; on one afternoon we took a walk in the bush. This area is known for its large concentration of elephants, and we saw them everywhere. One afternoon we saw giraffes



sparring and impalas fighting. We also saw a large pack of wild dogs, which we found out later is very rare to see. One evening we took a boat ride on the river to see the hippos, which would charge us if we got too close. On the way back to shore we watched a pack of wild dogs stalking a family of waterbucks antelope. They had already bitten the young waterbuck, but the stag was able to fend off the dogs. We saw the waterbucks the next day and the one who had been bitten was okay. We did see a number of animals that had been attacked and wounded, but had managed to survive.

One of the nicest experiences we had was a lunch by a pool of hippos. We were not told in advance and were wondering why we were not going back to camp for lunch, when we came upon the pool, where a table had been set up and a brunch prepared for us, complete with champagne. It was a wonderful way to enjoy a meal.

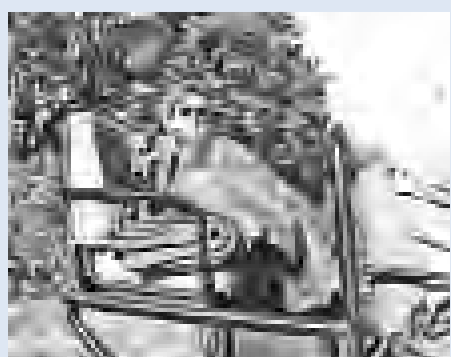
We enjoyed our stay at Duma Tau, but were eager to get to our next stop – Victoria Falls.



A cheetah with cub.



An angry elephant.



Evelyn keeping warm.



With our guide.



The Land Rover that carried us.

## RLACEI MEMBER NEWS:

**Bob Cutler**, retired Personnel Analyst, gives classes to help employees prepare for their next job interview. Call him at (310) 937-5678 to make arrangements, or email him: BC510@aol.com.

**Cheryl Rogers** lives in Santa Barbara and is a commissioner on the County Housing Authority. She bikes and volunteers at a clinic. Call her at (805) 957-1987.

**Ken Wang** retired five years ago, and was a street designer. Now he is building a house in Alhambra on a 45-foot slope.

**Esther M. Long** worked as an Administrative Assistant for former Councilmen Art Snyder and then Tom Bradley. She recently had open-heart surgery and is recovering at a facility in Apple Valley. Her cell phone number is (760) 408-1714.

**John Iwamiya** retired as a Construction Engineer 14 years ago. He writes, "I will be going on my fifth short term mission trip through my church to Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina for three weeks."

**Rose Valido**, one of the winners in the 2007 Retirees Poetry Contest, writes, "Thank you for your kindness in considering some simple rhymes as worthy of a prize. Thank you for your encouragement, the willing service you provide and the joy you spread around."

Happy first anniversary to **Frances Cota** and **John Schulz**, who married on Jan. 6, 2007, in Wofford Heights, Calif. Fran was a regular winner in our Poetry Contest.

The **L.A. Federal Credit Union** has opened a new full-service branch in El Monte, at 9204 Flair Dr., Suite A. LAFUCU also collected 700 toys for its annual "Toys for Tots" drive.

**LACERS** can help you care for a family member, a friend or yourself. If you are enrolled in a LACERS medical plan, you are eligible for Evercare-Solutions for Caregivers. Experts are available 24/7 free of charge. Call (866) 896-1895 for assistance.

**If you move, or change your address**, contact Membership Chair Helen Salgado at (800) 678-4145, ext. 713, or write to her at 8372 Arnett Dr., Huntington Beach CA 92647. Also notify LACERS, Alive!, El Pueblo and LAFUCU.

**If you have news about yourself or other retirees** that you'd like to share, send it to Phil Skarin at 5301 Norwich Ave., Van Nuys, CA 91411, or phone (818) 784-0130.

To find out the latest retirement news, visit [www.rlacei.com](http://www.rlacei.com)

## LACERS

### Employee of The Quarter

#### ■ Shirley Howard is LACERS' Summer Employee of the Quarter.

LACERS — The Los Angeles City Employees' Retirement System (LACERS) chose Shirley Howard as the summer 2007 Employee of the Quarter.

Shirley Howard, who has worked at LACERS for many years, was honored Dec. 6 by her fellow employees during the Quarterly Exemplary Staff Recognition luncheon. The employee of the quarter is selected by senior staff based on a record of excellent work during the quarter.

LACERS General Manager Robert Aguillo Jr. presented Shirley with a desk plaque, commemorating her hard work and diligence, as well as a \$200 savings bond. Shirley accepted the plaque and said, "Thank you for this award. I'm very pleased to have been simply nominated."

Shirley works in the Health Benefits Administration Division, where she handles



Shirley Howard accepts her desk plaque for being named Summer Employee of the Quarter at a ceremony last December.

the largest of LACERS medical plans for retired City Employees.



THOUGHT FOR THE DAY:

### The Wings of Love

Love is like a beautiful butterfly,  
Delicate, elusive and alluring.  
Looking for a little nectar  
From a generous flower.

Lifting low spirits with its wings as it flies towards the sun,  
And laughing at mortals too heavy to fly.

— Phil Skarin

## RLACEI's Toll-Free Number

RLACEI — The Retired Los Angeles City Employees Inc. group has established a new toll-free helpline number that can be accessed free of charge throughout the United States.

**The number is: (800) 678-4145**

Call the Helpline to reach the officers of RLACEI. For information on problems, activities, meetings or membership, call the helpline. Each officer's extension is listed.

Edward Harding x703	Jack Matthews x712	Americo Garza x710
Harold Danowitz x707	Robert Wilkinson x704	Neil Ricci x714
Phil Skarin x709	Jerry Bardwell x706	Helen Salgado x713

## Retiree Question of the Month

Alive! asked retirees...

# What's the best movie you ever saw at a drive-in?



"I'm too old to remember."  
— Robert Large Sr., Retired, General Services



"I've never been to a drive-in."  
— Howard Steinberg, Retired, Controller's Office



"Rebel Without a Cause, with James Dean and Sal Mineo."  
— John Gomez, Retired, Rec and Parks



"Although I didn't see it at a drive-in, my favorite Christmas movie was White Christmas."  
— Ella Garza, wife of Americo Garza



"The Color Purple."  
— Elvie Walker, Retired, Public Works/Street Maintenance



"Gone With the Wind."  
— Altrechia Hopson



"The Good, the Bad and the Ugly."  
— Curtis Hopson, Retired, Public Works/Street Services



"Gone With the Wind."  
— Herbert Hyman, Retired, Public Works/Street Maintenance



"The Ten Commandments."  
— Calvin Haney, Retired, Rec and Parks



"Moses."  
— Marilyn McPherson, Retired, Rec and Parks



"Breakfast at Tiffany's."  
— Gene McPherson, Retired, Public Works



"Casablanca."  
— Tony Alvarez, Retired, General Services

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