

For Retired Club Members



The Best Years

City Retiree Associations:

DWP Retirees Association



Dolores Foley, President
Phone: (626) 445-7376
E-mail: vinmar@altrinet.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?

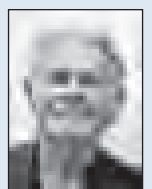
Contact Phil Skarin, 5301 Norwich Ave., Van Nuys, CA 91411-3910, or call (800) 678-4145 Ext. 709.

Upcoming Events:

- April 10: General Membership Meeting at Van Nuys/Sherman Oaks Senior Center. Lunch at noon; meeting at 1 p.m.
- June 4: 30th Annual Retirees Golf Classic at Alhambra Golf Course
- Aug. 7: Annual Picnic at Grace E. Simons Lodge, 11:30 a. m.
- Oct. 16: Annual Corporation Meeting and Elections at the Van Nuys/Sherman Oaks Senior Center. Lunch at noon; meeting at 1 p.m.
- Dec. 4: Christmas Party at noon at Grace E. Simons Lodge

RLACEI:

Three Retiree Groups To Meet About Joining



By Phil Skarin,
RLACEI Publicity Chair

President Ed Harding reports:



Ed Harding

In just a few weeks, April 10, we will be attending one of our General Membership Meetings at the Van Nuys / Sherman Oaks Senior Center, 5056 Van Nuys Blvd. The meeting starts at 1 p.m. You can come for a free lunch at noon, but only if you have made a reservation at least a week in advance by calling one of the officers on the Retirees Helpline.

Director Americo Garza, in charge of entertainment, reports that our luncheon will be better than our last one. He has ordered lemon chicken, legs and thighs, and all the goodies.

On Feb. 28, we are scheduled to meet with President Robin Welborn and Director Lee Kebler of the L.A. Retired Fire and Police Association, Inc., and Dolores Foley of the Retired Water and Power Association. One idea we will be discussing will be the Preliminary Audit Recommendation to Create a New Investments Function. It seems the City Controller wants to commingle the Pension Funds of the L.A. Fire and Police Pension system (LAFPP) and our Pension System (LACERS) and create a new com-

mission and staff to do all of the investing for both funds.

Keith Richman has been circulating petitions for an initiative titled Public Employee Benefits Reform Act (also known as the Richman initiative) to go on the state ballot. As of this writing, I don't know if he has received enough signatures to have it put on the ballot. It would eliminate all current pension systems for all public agencies in the state and replace them with a 401-K or similar system.

Your Medicare Part B premiums could be affected if you sell a home or other asset in which you have built up significant capitol gains. Each year, Social Security reviews your most recent tax data to determine your Medicare premium. The higher you're adjusted gross income, the higher will be your premium.

RLACEI has a new e-mail address rlacei@verizon.net. Check it out to find the latest retirement news. If you call, the RSVP mailbox is 701, after dialing (800) 678-4125.

If a retiree marries after retirement, the new spouse doesn't get any retirement benefits. The Retired Fire and Police Associations is trying to have a charter amendment put on the ballot that could give the new spouse some retirement benefits by reducing the retiree's pension to

finance it. If this gets approved by the voters, then LACERS will attempt to obtain a similar benefit for its members by amending the Administrative Code. They do not require a charter amendment. Stay tuned.

The L.A. Federal Credit Union is offering its members the opportunity to develop a Home Equity Line of Credit, so they can access cash to cover any expense including home improvements, education, etc. Call (877) 695-2328, ext. 7702 or stop at a branch office. LAFUCU also offers investment and insurance services with CFS, a broker-dealer.

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 to: Identify community resources; an onsite assessment and consultation; and arrange two free hours of consulting/ services with an Elder Law Attorney. Simply call (866) 896-1895 for assistance. If you have questions, contact LACERS at (213) 473-7200 or (800) 779-8328.

If you are interested in being considered for nomination for a director office on the RLACEI Executive Board, contact Nominating Chair Neil Ricci at 458 21st Pl., Santa Monica, CA 90402. Send him a resumé of your experience and qualifications.

Legislative Update:



Ken Spiker

The California Supreme Court has accepted the San Diego case for review. Legal advisers expect a decision by this fall.

Some time ago, my committee (Benefits Administration) and the LACERS Board of Directors unanimously approved authorizing a dental subsidy for our surviving spouses. Currently we have 3,084 surviving spouses, and 1,274 are in a LACERS dental plan.

Councilmen Bernard Parks and Dennis Zine were kind enough to put in a Council motion to support the subsidy.

The CAO report to the Council indicated the cost would be \$1.9 million per year with \$1.3 million from the General Fund and \$600,000 from special funds. (I disagree with both numbers.) The CAO further reported that all benefit enhancements should be considered in the content of all benefits available to retirees. Also, the City has only considered cost neutral benefit enhancements. The CAO said, "We cannot recommend that this benefit

be approved." The matter was "received and filed."

The matter of combining the LACERS and Fire and Police Pensions investment programs is again being considered. A new department and commission (without a retiree member) would be formed. Unless supplemental information is generated, I intend to oppose the audit recommendation. If it's such a good idea, why isn't the Water and Power investment program included?

Recession or not, our retirement fund is still healthy.

RLACEI Website

Hal Danowitz asks you to visit the RLACEI Website at 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



Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe



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



Falling for Zimbabwe

■ Hal's African adventure continues at Victoria Falls. Part three of four.

Let's continue the story of our trip to Africa.

After lunch at Camp Duma Tau, our baggage was loaded into the Land Rover and off we went to the airstrip to catch our plane. This plane was a Cessna 206, a seven-seater, just large enough for the pilot and the six of us. We were flying to Kasane on the border of Botswana and Zimbabwe, and then we would drive across the border to Victoria Falls. Because of the continuing unrest within Zimbabwe, I had some concerns about traveling within the country and was waiting to see how we would be treated as we crossed the border. A guide from Wilderness Safaris met our plane, and we started the short drive to the border crossing. I asked our guide how long the trip would take, and he said about an hour, unless we were held up at the border. When we reached the border, we were the only people crossing. We all got out and entered the office and presented our passports and a \$30 visa fee, which had to be paid in hard cur-

rency (dollars). They stamped our passport, and we were on our way in about 10 minutes; so much for my concerns. During the remainder of the drive to Vic Falls, we had to stop twice to let elephants cross the road.

Zimbabwe is a land-locked country in central-southern Africa that straddles the Tropic of Capricorn. It is about the size of California and has a population of about 13 million. Britain annexed Southern Rhodesia from the South Africa Company in 1923. A 1961 constitution was formulated to keep whites in power. In 1965, the government of Ian Smith unilaterally declared its independence, but

Britain did not recognize the act and demanded voting rights for the black African majority in the country, now called

Rhodesia. United Nations sanctions and a guerrilla uprising finally led to free elections in 1979 and independence, as Zimbabwe, in 1980. Robert Mugabe, the nation's first prime minister, has been the country's only ruler and has dominated the country's political system since inde-



A mile marker.

pendence. English is the official language.

Driving up to the Victoria Falls Hotel was like taking a step back into history. The hotel was built in 1904 when the Cape to Cairo railway reached the falls. It has played host to visiting members of the royal families, international and local statesmen and celebrities and maintains an atmosphere steeped in history, combining the charm of the old with the comfort and convenience of today. The rooms have all been refurbished to provide a perfect balance of modern amenities without losing the grand Edwardian architecture. It is set in acres of lush lawns and exotic flora. It is only a short walk from the center of town and only ten minutes from the actual falls. From our room we could see the large clouds formed by the spray over the falls, while the rest of the sky was clear and blue.

After checking into our room, we left for our visit to the falls. Victoria Falls is one of the seven natural wonders of the world and is the largest curtain of falling water on the earth. It was discovered by David Livingstone in November 1855 and is known by the local name of "Mosi Oa Tunya," or the "Smoke That Thunders." The falls creates its own weather, and we each received plastic ponchos to protect us from the rain. The trail we followed was about a mile long, and we were able to see the falls from a number of different viewing points. One of the most dramatic is Cataract View, the westernmost point, which requires climbing down a steep stair-



The Falls.

ADVENTURES with HAL!



Wearing our rain gear.

way in (and out of) the gorge. While the sun was shining brightly all around us, the sky above the falls was covered with clouds and we were rained on the whole time. The area around the falls is a spray-generated rain forest unlike the normal environment. Before returning to the hotel, we stopped to view the Zambezi Bridge and watch the tourists bungee-jump.

That evening we had dinner at the buffet in the hotel. It was one of the best buffets we have had, and we also enjoyed the entertainment, which was local dancing.

The next day was a free day to allow us a little rest and a chance to see the town and do some shopping. The town of Victoria Falls was built on tourism and reminded us of Tijuana. The streets are lined with small stores selling locally made souvenirs and crafts. Prices were fixed, but you could negotiate the rate of exchange. This brings me to our story on the rate of exchange.

On the drive to Vic Falls, I had asked our guide what the exchange rate was between the Zimbabwean dollars (ZWD) and the U.S. dollar. He told us between 90 and 100 ZWD to \$1. (The rate of exchange has changed dramatically since our trip, and is now \$1USD to \$30,000 ZWD). When we arrived at the hotel, I had noticed that the hotel was giving 70 ZWD to \$1, but I figured that you get the best rate of exchange at a bank or the official bureaus de change. We weren't too concerned about exchanging money because we could use our credit cards and you always get a better rate of exchange using the card (not including credit card service charges and fees). On the way to town, we stopped at a bank to see what the official rate was and were surprised to see it posted as 52 ZWD to \$1. This got us to thinking, and as we walked to town I saw a bureaus de change and they were offering 80ZWD. By this time we were a little confused, and I when into a shop and asked what rate they would give, I was told 100 ZWD. To



David Livingstone.

make a long story short, we ended up exchanging U.S. dollars for between 110 and 120 ZWD and used only ZWD to pay while we were in Zimbabwe. When we returned to the hotel we immediately paid our bill in ZWD instead of charging it to our credit cards. It was the first time we had come across reverse arbitrage. Because the official rate was 52 ZWD and we were getting over 100 ZWD, we did get some very nice bargains -- this area of Zimbabwe is known for its stone carving, and we purchased a nice piece to bring home. To close out the money story, at our next camp in Zimbabwe they had a store priced in U.S. dollars, so we exchanged our ZWD back at the official rate. So we made out coming and going.

We returned to the hotel in the afternoon and had high tea at Stanley's Terrace overlooking the falls. At our good rate of exchange it was about \$3.50 per person, which included tea, finger sandwiches and dessert. We also had a light dinner on the Terrace later that evening. We really enjoyed our stay at Victoria Falls; we got to catch up on the news (CNN and BBC) and read a newspaper and we called home to see if everyone was all right.

The next morning, we were picked up and driven to the Victoria Falls Airport and boarded another Cessna 206 for the flight to our next safari camp.

Next month I'll finish up the trip.



Afternoon tea at the hotel.



The Victoria Falls Hotel.

RLACEI MEMBER NEWS:

Jack Williams has been the Tournament Chairman for the L.A. City Employees Golf Club for 25 years. He's really on the ball.

Carlos Quiroz, Yucca Valley, writes, "Congratulations on your re-election as Publicity Chairman. Keep up the good work."

Bob Paul, Tennessee, writes, "We are living on the Cumberland Plateau and have traveled throughout the United States. We are very loyal Tennessee Volunteer sports fans. My wife is a volunteer at the hospital and I drive a local county dial-a-ride van."

Nick Buckroff, former Director of the Van Nuys/ Sherman Oaks Senior Center, has finally completed the restoration of a 1941 Chevy Special Deluxe Coupe after five years of painstaking effort. Pictures of the car and a full-page story of every detail of the restoration process was on page D2 of the Jan. 18 edition of the *Antelope Valley Press*.

Ronald Skarin, Principal Building Inspector, and son of Phil and Miriam Skarin, is retiring Feb. 29 after 34 years of City service. This makes Phil, who retired 20 years ago, feel a little older!

If you have news about yourself or other retirees, send it to Phil Skarin at 5301 Norwich Ave., Van Nuys, CA 91411, or fax (818) 906-3722, or phone (818) 784-0130.

An information sheet titled "Upon the Death of a Retired City Employee" is available by sending a stamped self-addressed envelope to Phil Skarin. See above address.



THOUGHT FOR THE DAY:

A Piece of the Puzzle

Puzzles are usually composed of many pieces of different shapes and sizes. But, when the pieces are put together in their proper places, the puzzle takes on the intended shape.

An organization too is like a puzzle. Many different tasks must be performed by many people of various skills and talents.

*There are the Presidents and vice presidents,
Managers and supervisors,
Secretaries and treasurers,
Editors and parliamentarians*

But an essential part of the organization is the average member who comes to meetings and dinners, and votes and pays dues, for they are all integral Pieces of the Puzzle.

— 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 was your first car?

THE BEST YEARS



"A 1927 Chevrolet."
— Edison Goodrich, Retired, Public Works/Street Maintenance



"A '46 black Plymouth, second-hand."
— Marian M. Jacobs, LACRTA



"A 1949 Ford two-door."
— Sam Hochbera, Retired Convention Center



"A 1950 Plymouth."
— Lee Burrell, Retired, General Services



"A Chevrolet Coupe."
— Barbara Smith, Retired, Personnel



"A 1951 Chevy."
— Robert Jacobs, Retired, Public Works/Street Maintenance



"A 1931 Chevy."
— Jimmie D. Wright, Retired, Public Works/Street Maintenance



"A '58 Oldsmobile convertible."
— Bebe Jacobson, Retired, LAPD



"A 1945 three-quarter-ton Ford [pickup]."
— Joe Etheredge, Retired in 1993, Airports in 1993



"A 1964 Galaxy 500XL."
— Martha Harding, wife of Ed Harding, President, RLACEI



"A 1995 Toyota Tercel."
— Bre Jacobs

FOR RETIRED CLUB MEMBERS

Water for His Homeland



■ **Street Services' Tom Eng builds water wells in five villages in his native Cambodia.**

Story and photos courtesy Public Works

PUBLIC WORKS — The Board of Public Works honored Bureau of Street Services Maintenance Laborer Tom S. Eng Jan. 28 for his humanitarian work to bring wells to five villages without water and power in his native Cambodia.

A survivor of the Khmer Rouge of Cambodia, Eng fled the war and regime that led to the execution, starvation and forced labor of an estimated 1.6 million people out of a population of 7.5 million between 1975 and 1979.

Impoverished, without food, clothing or medicine, Eng left his village in Kandal Province, approximately 28 miles north of Phnom Penh, the capitol of Cambodia. He walked for one

month, approximately 300 miles, to reach the Cambodian and Thailand border to escape the Khmer Rouge. There he spent the next six months in a Thailand refugee camp and the following two years learning English. On Aug. 16, 1983, the United Nations brought Eng to the United States as a Khmer survivor where he arrived in Los Angeles to begin a new life.

Eng began his career with the City in October 1999 with the Bureau of Street Services (BSS). He was employed as a vocational worker assigned to the Resurfacing Division and then was promoted and reassigned as a maintenance assistant with the Lot Cleaning Division. He was promoted in August 2005 to maintenance laborer and currently drives an over-cab-loader in the removal of illegally dumped debris. He recently obtained a Building and Safety Equipment License, allowing him to be trained in heavy equipment.

In October 2006, he traveled back to Cambodia to help his surviving family members and neighboring villages with the support and donations from his colleagues at BSS. Eng has one brother and four sisters who live in Cambodia. Eng went to Cambodia to construct five wells in five villages that have no water or



Family, friends and officials gather around Tom Eng after he received his commendation Jan. 28.

electricity. The World Health Organization estimated that access to potable water had improved by 2003, but the projection included nearly two-thirds of the rural population and one quarter of city inhabitants relied on unsafe water sources.

Eng returned to Cambodia in November to contract and construct six new wells in five more villages with donations from BSS employees in the Lot Cleaning and Resurfacing Division as well as Jorge Sanchez of Local SEIU. Eng received donations totaling \$1,300 and matched their donations with money he had saved working overtime. The six wells brought water to an estimated 320 families that had previously walked miles to the local source with four-gallon containers. The estimated cost for the construction of each well was \$300 to \$600.

Eng said that, after receiving his certificate of recognition, he intended to return to Cambodia this November to deliver medicines, dried goods, cooking oil and clothes. The United Nations Population Fund estimated that the average per capita income is at no more than \$290 annually, and that close to 40 percent of the entire population lives below the poverty line. The fund also projected that rural households comprise up to 90 percent of the country's poor.

Ron Olive, Assistant Director of the Bureau of Street Services, and his colleagues from the Lot Cleaning and Resurfacing Divisions, with representatives from SEIU, all expressed their support and admiration for Eng's effort to give back and

make a difference for his native country.

"Existence without water places people under extraordinary stress so the nexus between clean water and a better quality of life is clear for locations that must rely upon retaining ponds or far-away rivers—everything changes for the better with the addition of a well," said Cynthia M. Ruiz, president of the Board of Public Works. "We are extremely proud of Mr. Eng and the support he received that resulted in a more sustainable environment for these villagers in Cambodia."

All the members of the Board of Public Works commended Eng's commitment to help bring well water to villagers in his native country and praised his efforts and the efforts of his supporters as emblematic of our humanity and collective duty to try and help the destitute and needy.



Participating in the commendation ceremony were, front row, from left: Raul Henriquez; Jonathan Weathington; Enrique Palmas; Tom Eng (holding certificate); Michael Holmes; Phyliss Meyi; and James Johnson, SEIU Local 721. Back: James Washington, SEIU; Jorge Sanchez, SEIU; Martin Alarcon; Deon Jones; Ron Olive; Sherarade Nichols; and Jeff Costa.



Tom Eng receives his commendation at the City Hall ceremony Jan. 28.