

Because It's Fun!! *By Brenda Kane*

That was the most common answer when I asked some of our long-serving executive members why they joined and continue to be a part of STARTA. Everyone was so enthusiastic and had so many good comments and memories that it has been very difficult to summarize them in one article.

The following members were interviewed:

- David Flower - ARTA "News & Views" Editor and STARTA Newsletter Editor
- Alison Weingardt – Phoning Coordinator and Historian
- Joan Trettler – President
- Helen Kieran – Phoning Coordinator and Treasurer
- Betty Thronson, speaking for former President, Rod Thronson
- Lou Duigou – President, Secretary
- Jack Flaherty – President
- Larry & Donna Wyatt – Program Coordinator, Web Master, President

1. What was your main reason for joining STARTA?

The overwhelming response was that STARTA offered retired teachers the fellowship of friends and other retired teachers, and the continuing contact with the world of education. Members wanted to keep in touch with former colleagues and meet new friends.

Betty noted that Rod retired in 2001 and was a little concerned about how he would fill all his spare time after 47 years of teaching. He missed school, the students, staff, meetings, and all. So they joined STARTA, which gave them the opportunity to connect with others in their retirement years. Helen and Alison agreed that they joined STARTA so they didn't feel so isolated after they retired.

David added that he felt an obligation to continue his interest in education after working for the ATA for many years.

Joan also felt it was a good way to meet new people who were very committed to the welfare of retired teachers.

2. Why did you continue to be a member and serve on the Executive of STARTA?

Most of those interviewed said they enjoyed planning and organizing activities, the friendship of members and the rest of the Executive, and meeting the challenges involved.



Helen Kieran and David Flower welcoming members to the STARTA breakfast

David admitted that he communicates well in writing and enjoys doing the newsletter. He cares deeply about issues in education and politics and writing became an outlet for sharing these interests.

As well as being President of STARTA, Rod was also ARTA'S representative on Public Interest Alberta's Seniors Task Force so there were meetings, petitions, speeches, brochures to distribute, rallies and picketing to support the seniors' concerns. He often told Betty that he enjoyed this involvement.

"It's fun! I enjoy the breakfasts, social outings, and keeping up with news about former colleagues, schools, and the community," added Alison.

Larry and Donna mentioned, "In addition to meeting old friends, we have really enjoyed the programs over the years. The programs provide opportunities to keep current."

Joan feels that teachers are unique and caring and it is nice to spend time with them. She also commented that another good reason to belong is to take advantage of the ARTA Benefits Plan.

3. What have you enjoyed the most during your years with STARTA/ARTA?

The "social occasions" seem to be the most enjoyable --- the highlights mentioned most often.

There were some nostalgic replies to this question, as former executives talked about the "Early Days of STARTA" - bus trips to Rosebud for the lunch theatre which were fun until they became too expensive, trips to see the Legal murals and Ft. Edmonton, the funny hat parades, costumes at Halloween, Joe Berlando's Esotones band and singsongs at Christmas; Christmas lights tour, Mayfield dinner shows, the tour of the newly opened Macdonald Hotel, the presentation of the STARTA bench to the Botanical Gardens for International Year of the Elder Person, and donations to the library and youth center. They also mentioned programs where members shared their talents or took part in skits and fashion shows.



Joan & Ron Trettler with Morag and Gary Pansegrau and the STARTA bench presented during the International Year of the Elder Person

Most mentioned that they enjoyed the STARTA breakfasts with friends, and the meetings and programs that followed. There have been excellent speakers on a wide variety of topics, and interesting videos. Jack liked to listen to the STARTA choir.

Betty mentioned, "When we first joined we liked the pot-luck picnics at the St. Albert Botanic Gardens followed by a walking tour of the gardens. Now the picnics at Lions Park are just as enjoyable. I think all the members who have worked on the programs have done a wonderful job of providing a wide choice of events each year. Both Rod and I participated in the yearly golf tournaments and my family and I were especially pleased when STARTA named their 2011 tournament and B.B.Q. in memory of Rod, and then went on to host the 2012 ARTA Memorial Golf Tournament in Rod's name. We will always remember those. Over the years I have enjoyed the, book sales, silent auctions, choir, and many different events. I know one of Rod's favorites was the horse races. But I think what we really liked most were the people of STARTA."

Joan stated that as President, she tried to link people to seniors' activities to help them be connected and not feel alone and feels that "connecting is the most important part of the organization". She also enjoyed seeing STARTA become financially stable.

As well as editing the News and Views magazine and our local newsletter, David enjoyed being a part of the Political Involvement Committee with ARTA. He mentioned the fun he had with Rod as they demonstrated outside MLA offices. Jack also wants to give credit to Rod Thronson for his tireless efforts to urge the St. Albert MLA to lobby the cabinet to make changes to the senior's health and pharmaceutical requirements.

Jack and Lou both stated that having a very strong and hard working executive made it enjoyable to be President of STARTA.

4. What were the challenges STARTA faced over the years?

There have been a number of challenges over the years for our executive members. Joan summed it up by saying, "When there are groups it is challenging to feel included so it is important to try to keep the group together. You can't please all the people all the time. When planning for the breakfasts the association should meet the members' needs and not vice versa."

The most difficult has been finding a suitable venue for our breakfasts. As the local branch membership grew, we had to leave the Cornerstone Hall. Since then we have had difficulties with parking, space, and quality of food as we have tried various venues. There are only so many choices in St. Albert. Larry says, "It is a challenge to provide an interesting breakfast at a reasonable cost with enough space and parking. I think that STARTA has spent more time on this than anyone could ever imagine."

Several executive members mentioned that finding people to serve on the executive or on committees is challenging. Alison says that hardest task has been to convince people to serve on the executive and not be afraid to become involved. It is also a challenge to include the interests and skills of new members.

Helen also mentioned that it is an on-going challenge to reach newly retired teachers and let them know we are here.

David also believes that teachers both present and retired have a moral obligation to get the best education for their students they can and he is frustrated that so few teachers/retired teachers get involved in political lobbying to improve the education system.

Other challenges include looking for good speakers that will interest the wide age and interest range, and estimating the number of people who will attend since we have to pay for those who don't turn up.

5. Do you think there is a future for STARTA and ARTA?

"Definitely!" says Helen. "Look at the numbers of people who attend every month. It is obviously fulfilling a need."

"Absolutely!" says Alison. "They are both very much alive. STARTA is vibrant, a great organization, and currently very well run. I worked on the Executive for many years and I know it takes many hours from people involved to make things happen."

"I think the future of STARTA is bright as is the future of ARTA", replies Lou. "In my ten years I have seen both organizations grow and flourish. The future is important because Retired Teachers need a strong voice to articulate their needs in health care and other areas of endeavor in order to maintain a high quality of life. ARTA has become a more vigorous and mature organization, thanks to the foresight and work of those who started ARTA 50 years ago. Thank you to all those people along the years who worked in ARTA and subsequently the chapters like STARTA.

However, David is concerned that ARTA will become a “benevolent society for teachers, nurses, and government employees.” He fears that it is becoming an insurance company and has lost its focus on retired teachers.

Joan feels that it is good that STARTA is predictable. People know when and where breakfasts will be held and they look forward to attending when they are here and not away travelling. She suggests that we continue to focus on the welfare of the members. “It is important to visit members when they are not well and keep in contact with them so they don’t feel isolated. Phoning is key to our group being successful – we can’t just email. If we maintain the “personal touch”, STARTA will continue to be strong.”

Donna and Larry summed up the general feeling of those interviewed. “We expect that STARTA and ARTA will both grow on the strong foundations established in both organizations. Teachers have always had plenty to offer to the community and to organizations. Retired teachers are no different and we are fortunate to have active members in both organizations.”



Lou Duigou and Larry Wyatt in their Panama hats