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Winter 2014

# Retiring TIMES

Vermont State Employees' Retirement System

## Managing food costs!

***Food costs can be challenging to manage at any stage in our lives. See our feature on page six for creating a grocery game plan.***

# RETIREMENT IN THE NEWS

## Check Out These Stories Related to Aging and Retirement!

**There's a positive** trend in retirement plan participation nationwide. The percentage of workers who participate in an employment-based retirement plan increased in 2013 for the first time since 2010--both among all workers and private-sector workers, according to a recent report from the Employee Benefit Research Institute. Specifically, the percentage of all workers participating in an employment-based retirement plan increased to 40.8 percent in 2013, up from 39.7 percent in 2010. The number of workers participating rose to 64.2 million in 2013, the highest number since 2007. This report from EBRI, a private, nonpartisan, nonprofit research institute, is just one story related to retirement and aging we thought would be of interest to ***Retiring Times*** readers. In this edition, we've summarized a few headline-grabbing stories to get you thinking about your retirement.

## Changes in Health Care Premiums in 2015

The Vermont Department of Human Resources recently notified active and retired employees of premium changes for the two health care plans effective January 1, 2015. The following is a breakdown of the percentage changes for your convenience:

**TotalChoice Subscribers**

| | |
|---|---|
| Active employees & non-Medicare eligible retirees | 17.9% increase |
| Medicare retirees alone, or Medicare retirees with only Medicare eligible dependents on their coverage | 1% increase |

**Selectcare Subscribers**

| | |
|---|---|
| Active employees & non-Medicare eligible retirees | 17.9% increase |
| Medicare retirees alone, or Medicare retirees with only Medicare eligible dependents on their coverage | 2.3% decrease |

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## Are Generation Xers Less Prepared for Retirement?

August 14, 2014. EMPLOYEE BENEFIT RESEARCH INSTITUTE— Are Gen Xers in worse shape than the Baby Boom generation when it comes to having enough money for retirement? Not if you take into account future contributions and the current trends in automatic plan design features, according to the Employee Benefit Research Institute (EBRI).

**Ignoring decades of potential future contributions exaggerates the percentage of workers simulated to run short of money in retirement.**

A new report by EBRI notes that projections by some other organizations have alleged that Generation Xers (those born between 1965-1974) will have a smaller likelihood of generating adequate retirement income than their older Baby Boom cohort (those born between 1948-1964).

"Unfortunately, these studies appear to be plagued by either explicitly ignoring future contributions to 401(k) plans or the recent auto-enrollment changes now found in many 401(k)-type plans," said Jack VanDerhei, EBRI research director and author of the report. "Calculating

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retirement income adequacy is very complex and it's important to use reasonable assumptions and current data if you want credible results."

The EBRI report notes that significant plan design changes accelerated by the Pension Protection Act of 2006 has led many 401(k) sponsors to adopt automatic enrollment features to their retirement plan (including auto-escalation of contributions). Auto-enrollment has been found to have a significant positive impact on retirement readiness, especially for lower-income workers. By comparison, EBRI's Retirement Security Projection Model® (RSPM) incorporates the crucial factor of future worker contributions to defined contribution retirement plans--as well as the impact of auto-enrollment and auto-escalation in 401(k) plans. One of the major findings in each of the annual EBRI RSPM studies since 2010 is that the overall retirement income adequacy prospects for Gen Xers is approximately the same as Early Boomers and Late Boomers.

**Read more:** www.ebri.org/pdf/PR1092.GenX.14Aug14.pdf

## How Much Should People Save for Retirement?

July 2014. CENTER FOR RETIREMENT RESEARCH AT BOSTON COLLEGE. The National Retirement Risk Index (NRRI) shows that half of today's working families are "at risk" of not being able to maintain their standard of living once they retire. This result is not surprising given that half of private sector workers do not have an employer-sponsored retirement plan and that many who do have a plan save relatively little. The question is how much households would have to save in order to maintain their pre-retirement living standards.

The NRRI model suggests a targeted income replacement rate for all income levels of 73 percent.

**NRRI Target Replacement Rates**

| Income Group | Target Replacement Rate |
|---|---|
| All | 73 percent |
| Low income | 80 percent |
| Middle income | 71 percent |
| High income | 67 percent |

(Source: Authors' calculations.)

The replacement percentage rate varies by household income, since Social Security's progressive benefits replace a higher portion of pre-retirement income for lower-income households than for those with higher incomes. For example, the middle income household will require 71 percent of pre-retirement income to maintain pre-retirement living standards. This amount breaks down as follows: 41 percent of pre-retirement income from Social Security, 4 percent from a reverse mortgage, and 6 percent from imputed rent, which means that the rest – 21 percent – needs to come from retirement savings plans. In the case of housing, the projections calculate two distinct sources of income: the rental value that homeowners receive from living in their home rent free – "imputed rent" – and the amount of equity they could borrow from their housing wealth through a

(continued pg. 4)

## Vermont Taxes
## RESOURCES ONLINE!

As we head into the 2015 tax season, the Vermont Department of Taxes can help you get ready with helpful resources on their website at www.tax.vermont.gov on their "Publications" web page. Here are just a few topics.

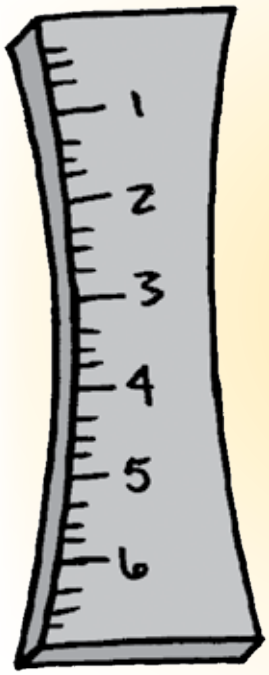
- **Have you heard of Vermont Use Tax? If you make purchases on the internet or in a state that does not collect sales tax, chances are you owe use tax in Vermont. The fact sheet "Vermont Use Tax for Individuals" explains what it is and the circumstances requiring you to file use tax.**
- **If you plan on filing for a Property Tax Adjustment or Renter Rebate, you may be looking for help to figure the right amount of household income, essential for determining eligibility for both programs. Look for the fact sheet "Vermont Schedule HI-144: How to Determine Household Income."**
- **Vermont offers a property tax exemption that is a minimum of $10,000 for qualified disabled military veterans. To learn more details, read the fact sheet "Veterans and Property Taxes: What You Should Know."**

The "Vermont 2014 Income Tax Return Booklet" and tax forms are available on the department's web site at www.tax.vermont.gov. If you prefer, you may order paper forms by calling 1-855-297-5600 or emailing taxforms@state.vt.us. Please provide your name, mailing address, form name or number, and daytime phone number. Allow about 7 to 10 business days to receive forms.

## *Retiree Update*

| | JAN | FEB | MAR | APRIL | MAY | JUNE | JULY | AUG | SEPT | OCT | NOV | DEC |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2014 | 43 | 17 | 21 | 27 | 30 | 40 | 31 | 26 | 27 | 25 | 38 | 14 |
| 2013 | 45 | 18 | 26 | 25 | 27 | 22 | 42 | 26 | 25 | 30 | 31 | 16 |
| 2012 | 51 | 24 | 15 | 18 | 37 | 25 | 32 | 30 | 34 | 23 | 22 | 23 |
| 2011 | 47 | 28 | 12 | 21 | 30 | 23 | 44 | 19 | 27 | 19 | 19 | 14 |
| 2010 | 75 | 16 | 25 | 27 | 23 | 33 | 35 | 36 | 22 | 24 | 20 | 19 |

## Who is the average active and retired VSERS member?




ACTIVE MEMBERS: 8,325
RETIRED MEMBERS: 5,980

AVERAGE AGE OF ACTIVE: 45
AVERAGE AGE AT RETIREMENT: 61

AVERAGE YEARS OF SERVICE CREDIT ACTIVE: 11.7

AVERAGE ANNUAL EARNINGS ACTIVE: $52,574
AVERAGE ANNUAL PENSION RETIRED: $17,467

# Make Sense of Your 1099-R Form

The tax statement for retirees that is generated and distributed in January is called a 1099-R. Every year, our office receives numerous questions regarding how to read the tax statement. This article is intended to assist retirees by explaining what each box on the 1099-R represents. The descriptions below only identify those boxes on the form that are used by the Vermont State Retirement System for reporting your pension to the IRS.

**BOX 1** Displays the gross amount of the pension you have received during calendar year 2014, before any deductions have been withheld.

**BOX 2a** Displays the taxable amount of the pension you have received during calendar year 2014. In some cases, boxes 1 and 2a reflect the same amount. If the amount in box 2a is smaller than the amount in box 1, it means that you made contributions into the retirement system while actively employed that you paid taxes on, and therefore, those same already-taxed contributions will not be taxed again in retirement.

**BOX 4** Displays the total amount that has been withheld for federal taxes, based on your filing status, during calendar year 2014. If the amount in box 4 is blank, then you have either elected not to withhold federal taxes, or your filing status results in a -0- withholding.

**BOX 5** Displays the portion of the total pension reflected in box 1 that is not taxable. If box 5 is blank, it means that your pension is fully taxable. NOTE – this box can be confusing as it appears to indicate that insurance premiums should be displayed here. Our system does not use this box for insurance premiums, nor is it a deduction of any kind.

**BOX 7** Displays the IRS code for a pension distribution.

**BOX 12** Displays the total amount that has been withheld for Vermont State taxes, based on your filing status, during calendar year 2014. If the amount in box 12 is blank, then you have either elected not to withhold Vermont taxes, or your filing status results in a -0- withholding.

**BOX 13** Displays the state to which the withholding was paid and the payer's federal identification number.

**ACCOUNT NUMBER** Displays your unique retirement system retirement number.

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# Local Investment

## Treasurer's Office Works to Support Vermont's Economy

**by Beth Pearce, Vermont State Treasurer**

**Supporting economic development** in Vermont through local investments is an essential part of our future plans in growing Vermont's economy and in building communities that are sustainable and livable. The State Treasurer's Office has the opportunity to invest locally through several avenues. As I've previously discussed, keeping our public pension plans fiscally healthy and providing secure retirement income to Vermont State employees, teachers and municipal employees is a local investment that benefits the overall economy.

The National Institute on Retirement Security recently updated their annual calculations on the economic impact of retiree spending of pension benefit income. Public pension benefit payments paid to Vermont residents in fiscal year 2011-2012 had a total economic impact of $427.7 million. The ripple effect of retiree pension benefit income supported 3,131 jobs that paid $126.6 million in total compensation to Vermont's workers. It also supported $69.7 million in annual federal, state, and local tax revenue. As our 2015 Vermont legislative session convenes, I remain committed to supporting policies and approaches that will further secure our pension fund and encourage local investment.

**Whether its pension income or capital financing, support for local investment is essential to growing Vermont's economy.**

Another approach I have taken to supporting local investment is as the Chair of the Local Investment Advisory Committee. The committee's general goal is to increase economic development activity in Vermont and create jobs by committing up to 10 percent of the Treasurer's office average available cash in local investments. These are funds that may be committed at the discretion of my office. Investment commitments to date total $25 million. Our first public hearing to solicit input in the areas of capital needs and potential investments was held in August. Of particular focus was how best to allocate an additional lending capacity of up to $10 million, as suggested in Act 199 of 2014. We have now held a number of public hearings to gain new insight on some of the barriers to capital financing in your communities relating to renewable energy, affordable housing, infrastructure, water/wastewater systems, economic development, transportation, and the financing of student higher education.

The committee will submit its findings to the State Legislature in January with the objective of identifying investment opportunities for the Treasurer's office, as well as making recommendations to reduce financial, transactional and regulatory barriers to the flow of resources. We plan to review existing programs, identify barriers and potential new resources. I want to thank everyone who has contributed to this effort. Together, we can all support efforts to keep Vermont's economy vital and stable for all of us to enjoy – both now and in our retirement years.

(Retirement Continued pg. 2)

reverse mortgage. The takeaway here is that a quarter of retirement income must come from retirement savings plans for low-income households, one third for the middle income and half for the high income.

How much will households need to save over their work-lives to generate the required amount of saved retirement income? Again, nothing is simple. Saving can be measured in any number of ways, given the pattern of income and consumption in the target model. The concept reported here measures net saving – positive saving less amounts required to pay off debts – divided by income from the age at which debt is repaid to age 65. The required annual savings rate produced by these calculations is: 11 percent for low income; 15 percent for the middle income household; and 16 percent for high income.

**Read more:** http://crr.bc.edu/briefs/how-much-should-people-save

**Editor Note:** The State Treasurer's Office offers a free workshop that teaches participants how to determine their own personal savings retirement rate. The name of the workshop is Keeping the Gold in Your Golden Years. If you would like to register for a future class, email your name, phone number, and town of residence to lisa.helme@state.vt.us.


**TOP 3 REASONS**

**WHY YOU SHOULD SAVE THROUGH THE 457(b) PLAN:**

1. **EASE OF CONTRIBUTING.** Contributions are automatically deducted from your paycheck & invested in your retirement savings account.
2. **TAX DEFERRED INVESTING!** Reduce your taxable income now.
3. **STRONG INVESTMENT LINEUP.** There's a wide range of diversified offerings. Those include a new fossil-fuel-free mutual fund and three more Socially Responsible Investment funds.

THE 457(b) PLAN IS A SUPPLEMENTAL RETIREMENT SAVINGS OPTION WHERE YOU CAN SAVE MORE MONEY FOR RETIREMENT.

Great-West Retirement Services manages the State's plan. Call 1 (802) 229-2391 for an appointment. More info at **www.vermont457.com.**

## COLA INCREASES EFFECTIVE JAN. 1

Based on the Northeast Region Consumer Price Index for all urban consumers as of June 30, 2014, the cost-of-living adjustments (COLA) that will be applied to pension payments on January 1, 2015 are as follows: Groups A, B, C and D, 1.9 percent increase; Groups E and F (only F members NOT actively contributing on 6/30/08), 1 percent increase; Group F (only F members actively contributing on or after 6/30/08 and who retired on or after 7/1/08), 1.9 percent increase. In order to qualify for a COLA, you must have received at least 12 pension checks prior to January 1. Group F retirees who retired under an early retirement also must have reached normal retirement age prior to January 1.

## SSA TO RESUME MAILING STATEMENTS

The Social Security Administration has announced it will resume mailing paper statements every five years. Statements will be mailed to workers who are not yet receiving Social Security at three months before their birthday when they turn ages 25, 30, 35, 40, 45, 50, 55 and 60. After age 60, people will receive a mailed statement every year. The agency expects to mail nearly 48 million statements each year. Anyone who has already registered to receive a statement electronically via a "*my* Social Security" account will not be mailed a statement. To date, more than 14 million people have established a "*my* Social Security" account online. The online access enables individuals to immediately access their Social Security statement. Both the electronic and mailed statements contain information regarding earnings, tax contributions, and estimates for future retirement, disability, and survivors benefits. In 2011, the Social Security Administration stopped mailing annual benefit statements in order to save millions on annual printing and mailing costs. Advocates for senior citizens asked for mailings to be resumed because of the many older Americans who do not have access to or fluency on the internet. The Social Security Administration encourages workers to sign up for a secure online account to view their statements. To sign up, go online to: **myaccount.socialsecurity.gov**.

Social Security Online Services
★ Convenient ★ Secure ★
www.socialsecurity.gov

(Premium Changes Continued pg. 1)

For non-Medicare retirees that have Medicare dependents on either plan, they will see a mix of the two, resulting in an increase that will fall between between 0% and 17.9%.

**For more information, you may:**

- Visit the Treasurer's website at: www.vermonttreasurer.gov/retirement/state-vsrs
- Visit the DHR open enrollment page at: http://humanresources.vermont.gov/salary/benefits/open_enrollment
- Contact the Employee Benefits Unit at (802) 828-6700 (option 1, then option 3)
- Send an email to: DHR.Benefits@state.vt.us

# Director's Corner

**by Laurie Lanphear, Director of Retirement Operations**

As a reminder, on January 1, 2015, Medicare-eligible retirees and their Medicare-eligible dependents enrolled in either the TotalChoice or Selectcare plans will obtain prescription drug coverage through a new program called EGWP (Employer Group Waiver Plan) Plus. Detailed information should already have been received by eligible retirees and their dependents outlining the specifics of the program. I will provide a brief summary in this article for your convenience.

This new program is a Medicare Part D prescription drug plan. Employers, in this instance the State, partner with a Pharmacy Benefit Manager, in this case Express Scripts, that have contracted directly with Medicare to be a Part D provider. This plan differs from a pure Medicare Part D plan in that it is not open to individuals, but is rather a specific plan only available to employers. The value of participating in an EGWP is that it is a well-positioned solution to help employers keep costs down and offer valuable retiree benefits.

The State included a "wrap" (the PLUS in the title) with the move to EGWP, which offers a comparable level of benefits will be identical to that previously offered without the EGWP. This change will be seamless and invisible to impacted subscribers, as the real work goes on behind the scenes. Discounts on prescriptions are negotiated at the pharmacy level, potentially resulting in significant additional annual savings for each covered member. The expectation is that this move will help stabilize the rising costs of prescription drugs. In summary, if you are Medicare-eligible and are covered through one of the medical plans offered by the State of Vermont, you do not need to do anything to be covered under EGWP Plus after January 1, nor should you experience any change in your current coverage.

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# GROCERY GAME PLAN!

Whether retired or still employed, we all want to make the most of our food budget. The smartest shoppers know that saving money is more than luck. Here are some suggestions from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to help you stretch your food dollars!

- Before you head to the store, plan your meals for the week. Include meals like stews, casseroles, or stir-fries, which "stretch" expensive items into more portions.
- To get the best price, check the sales flyers usually released mid-week. Particularly note sales on meat and seafood--often the most expensive items on your list. Use coupons, but only for items you know you'll use.
- Eat before you shop. Grocery shopping hungry can lead to impulse buys and unhealthy food choices.
- Locate the unit price on the shelf directly below the product. Use it to compare brands and package sizes to determine which is more economical.
- Look up and down for savings. Stores often stock the priciest items at eye level. You can save big looking at the upper and lower shelves too.
- Grab from the back. Stores typically stock shelves from back to front, placing the newest items behind the older ones. Reach in back for the freshest items especially in the produce, dairy, and meat aisles.
- For fruits and vegetables, buying in-season produce is usually less expensive and at peak flavor. If you won't eat it right away, consider canned or frozen produce. If you buy items without added salt or sauces they are as nutritious and often cost less.
- To lower meat costs, buy the family-sized pack and freeze what you don't use.
- Low-cost protein foods include beans and peas, such as kidney beans, split peas and lentils. Don't forget about eggs! They're a great low-cost option and easy to prepare.
- Cook once and eat all week! Prepare a large batch of favorite recipes on your day off and freeze in smaller containers. Use them throughout the week and avoid spending money on take-out meals.
- Buy the larger size of low-fat plain yogurt instead of individual flavored yogurts. Then add your own flavors by mixing in fruits.
- Get your creative juices flowing. Spice up leftovers by using them in new ways. Try leftover chicken in a stir-fry or over a garden salad, or to make chicken chili. Remember, throwing away food is throwing away your money!
- If a sale item has run out, ask the store for a rain check. This allows you to pay the sale price after the item is restocked.