

PRERESIDENT'S REPORT 2023-2024

This is my annual report as President of the BCGREA covering the period October 2023- October 2024. As with my previous reports, I am distributing it widely as I believe members should have an overview of the Associations' activities and plans.

Our upcoming AGM

As previously communicated, any member can observe our AGM by simply sending an email to info@bcgre.ca and getting the Zoom link. As an added enticement, you can be entered into a draw for an iPad courtesy of Belair Direct Insurance, should you attend the meeting online.

Both the new chair of the Board of Trustees for the Public Service Pension Plan, Angie Sorrell, and the new Seniors Advocate, Dan Levitt, will be speaking in the morning, along with our affinity partners – Belair Direct Insurance and Hearing Life.

Current status of the Association and Pension Plan

So how have we been doing? Our membership and finances are stable, though we do need to keep an eye on our budget as we have only small surpluses as befits a non-profit. As our volunteer base decreases, this puts increased pressure on having to pay for various administrative and program functions. Attracting new members remains a challenge given the over 90 employers who are part of the plan, all with disparate human resources practices. As well, most pre-retirement sessions are online.

We have had a number of organizational changes, including moving our fiscal year to a calendar year basis starting 2025. This should allow for better financial planning and integration with the dues remittances we receive from the Pension Corporation. Our upcoming 2024 AGM is also the first time we will be operating under our new governance model of two delegates per branch rather than representation by branch size. This change was adopted, with considerable debate, at our April directors meeting.

Our pension plan remains robust and well-funded and appears capable of navigating the myriad challenges of the modern world. The continued interest by various political factions to have pension funds such as ours invest for other reasons than the welfare of plan recipients (such as increased exposure to Canadian stock) remains a concern to me as well as the other retiree associations. I suspect we won't be shy about expressing our views! We are fortunate in being the only retiree association in the public sector family that directly appoints a trustee to its Board. A new term will commence next April for three years. We had an email canvas of the membership to ensure as wide a notification as possible about this opportunity. Several expressed interest and I, along with members of our executive, are currently reviewing the applications.

Affinity Partner news

There have also been changes on the affinity front as well. Johnson Insurance is now in the process of completing its rebranding as Belair Direct and integrating with their staff. This has caused some confusion with Belair Direct over the discounts available to our membership on both the travel and home insurance fronts. If you have any concerns in this regard, please reach out to us at info@bcgre.ca. Our dedicated Belair Direct representative has been very helpful in resolving issues. I also receive the occasional email suggesting that coverage under Belair Direct is not as good as other

plans. It is difficult to respond to these complaints as insurance quotes are very specific to the particular circumstances and the types of specific coverage. We intend to develop a checklist of items that you should consider irrespective of the carrier you choose for both home and travel/medical coverage. There are a lot of things to consider and some significant “gotchas” if you don’t.

As well, our arrangement with Simply Connect wireless for cell phones is coming to an end, as Rogers is ending this brand. There are cell phone and internet offers available from Endless Savings and More which do require proof of your membership – which is easily attainable if you need. I would invite you to check out these and the wide range of other offers of the ESM app if you haven’t already done so. My sense is this is an underutilized offering in part because it is digital. Having said that, it is worth checking out.

My activities as President

Over the past year, I have been able to attend branch meetings across Vancouver Island as well as the Kootenays and Lower Mainland. In all, I have met with folks from 12 branches. I am, as always, impressed by the dedication and hard work of branch volunteers in offering locally based activities.

I have also met with the new chair of the PSPP Board of Trustees and the executive director, the representatives from the non-direct plan partners and participated in a Zoom call with the various unions who represent active plan members to introduce the BCGREA. Other meetings have included the Council of Seniors Organizations of BC (COSCO), the Canadian Association of Retired Persons (CARP) and outreach representatives from the Canada Pension Plan. I, along with Jodine at Central Support, am in frequent contact with our affinity partners on issues and concerns on behalf of members, as well as with our colleagues in the College, Municipal, and Retired Teachers associations. I had the opportunity to attend the annual BC Investment Corporation conference and gained valuable insights about pensions and their sustainability from an international perspective. The good news is Canada and our various public sector plans (known as the “Maple 8”) are doing very well by international metrics.

It has been a busy year, but it would be an impossible workload were it not for the dedicated work being done by all the Provincial executive team as well as Jodine Ducs, our Central Support linchpin, and branch volunteers at both the local and provincial committee level. We all owe our thanks to these folks for helping to keep us running.

Looking to the future

I would now like to make a few comments on what I see as the challenges and opportunities that we face.

Volunteerism is dramatically down, at least as how it has traditionally been done. Like most volunteer run groups, we have real challenges both in recruiting people to help and in having people attend our local meetings. At the same time, and perhaps ironically, social connections are more frayed after COVID and especially for seniors who live alone or are facing losing a partner. There is compelling evidence that robust social connections are a key component of healthy aging. We are living longer and facing care and community integration issues as never before. There is an increasingly complex legal requirement around powers of attorney, wills and estates. It is a real challenge to downsize or pass on assets particularly to offspring who have different lifestyles and requirements.

I believe the BCGREA can, if it decides to, address some of these changes. To do this we need to take some first steps.

Critically, we need to know with greater clarity what our members **want and support**. We know most members read the Pen, value the representation, and appreciate receiving a variety of information updates. Many access deals from our affinity partners. A smaller percentage participate at the local level. Maintaining a viable branch network is challenging, especially in terms of getting members to volunteer for leadership roles. We should ensure that we do things that align our resources with what the membership wants.

Should I be re-elected as President, I intend to have the BCGREA explore the alignment of our resources. I want this to be an open exercise with involvement from as broad a range of perspectives as possible. After all, it is your organization, and your actions and wishes will determine its future. This may include asking you to participate in planning sessions or questionnaires, reaching out for help with specific tasks and/or providing your thoughts about what we should do or should not do.

Questions we might consider are: Is there any appetite to become more involved if we do things more informally- meetups and coffee for example? Should we have a social media offering so members can reach out to others who they might have worked with? Should we consider having province wide Zoom tutorials on topics like powers of attorney, downsizing and appraisal, estate planning? Post videos on YouTube? Engage writers to develop profiles of interesting members and their histories in the Pen? These are all approaches that have worked for other groups – do they make sense for us? Would you participate?

I believe our members should be canvased about these and other topics within the next few months. A survey is one of tools we have to connect with our over 11,500 members and ensure we have their support. We have had success in this regard: the results of our survey two years ago contributed to our recruitment campaign material and our membership blossomed!

While successful, the participation questions were more general than what we may now want- and we have had a 50% increase in membership. We need to gather the new members' views, rather than assume they are the same. We are also now in a post lockdown environment.

I believe that seeking direction is a key component to sustainability and continued relevance for the BCGREA and will advocate strongly for it if re-elected.

The BCGREA appreciates your individual views and suggestions for continued growth; I invite your comments! I can be contacted at president@bcgre.ca

As always, my heartfelt thanks to all who volunteer both with us and all other volunteer organizations.

Brian Green

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brian Green". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.