

# *Living* power

*For all who have made a living and now wish to make a life*

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*North Carolina*

**Retired  
Governmental  
Employees'  
Association**

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## State and Local Governmental Affairs

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### **TSERS/LGERS Board of Trustees to begin process for considering COLA for Local Government Retirees**

We are working to address the much needed COLA for local government retirees as well. The TSERS/LGERS Board of Trustees will hear the actuarial reports on the retirement fund on October 23, 2014 and will begin the process to consider a COLA increase for local government employees for next fiscal year. By all accounts the returns on the retirement funds investments provide optimism for a COLA for local government retirees. We will keep you posted as the process proceeds.

For more information on the TSERS/LGERS Board of Trustees go to <https://www.nctreasurer.com/ret/Pages/TSERS-and-LGERS-Board.aspx>

### **2014 Legislative Session comes to an end!**

The General Assembly adjourned sine die on August 20, 2014 and plans to convene the 2015 Session of the General Assembly on January 14, 2015. There is a chance the Governor will call a special session of the legislature to consider additional funding for business recruitment activities but such a session will be limited in its scope.

The next legislative session will see new leadership in the house with Speaker Tillis pursuing the U.S. Senate seat. The 2014 legislative session provided a 1% cost of living adjustment for teachers, state employees, judicial and legislative retirees. There were also several pieces of substantive legislation that were passed by the General Assembly that we tracked during session. I have provided a summary of those bills below.

### **Bills of Interest**

**House Bill 1079: Positions for State Treasurer Compliance Unit** - This bill authorizes two receipt-supported staff positions in the Retirement Systems Division to establish a compliance unit to reduce the risk of fraud, abuse, and waste in state and local retirement systems. This is a new initiative announced last year by State Treasurer Cowell. **The positions identified in this bill were incorporated into the Budget bill as receipt supported positions. SB 744 Appropriations Act of 2014 was ratified by the legislature and signed by the Governor on August 2, 2014**

**House Bill 1194: Retirement Administrative Changes Act of 2014** - The bill proposes a number of changes to the retirement systems. The most significant of these is a provision that would allow both current and prospective retirees in the state and local retirement systems who elected to take the contributory death benefit when they retired to designate a beneficiary other than a spouse. The current

law limits the beneficiary to a surviving spouse. If there is not a spouse, the death benefit is paid to the deceased member's estate. **This legislation was ratified by the General Assembly on July 29, 2014 and signed by the Governor on August 1, 2014.**

**House Bill 1195: Fiscal Integrity/ Pension Spiking Prevention** - The provisions of this bill apply to both state and local governmental employee retirement systems. The primary purpose of the bill is to authorize the Retirement Systems Division to identify and remedy situations in which the average final compensation of highly compensated employees (annual salaries of \$100,000 or more) was artificially inflated to significantly increase ("spike") pension payments. In cases where spiking was identified, the employer would have the option of providing an additional contribution to the affected retirement system to offset the actuarial impact of the spiking.

The bill also provides for payment of interest to individuals with less than five years of creditable service who withdraw from the state or local retirement systems to receive a return of the employee contributions plus interest. Under current law, members with less than five years of service who withdraw receive only the sum of their contributions.

Finally, the bill returns Teachers and State Employees' Retirement System and the Consolidated Judicial Retirement System vesting to 5 years for those who became members on or after August 1, 2011.

**This legislation was ratified by the General Assembly on July 23, 2014 and signed by the Governor on July 30, 2014.**

If you have any questions related to this past legislative session, please don't hesitate to send an email or give me a call. We will provide a 2015 legislative forecast in our next newsletter so **Stay Tuned!!**

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## **Lake Case Update**

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Following the Court of Appeals' ruling in June in favor of the Plaintiffs on July 23, 2014, the State of North Carolina filed a petition for discretionary review with the North Carolina Supreme Court in the Lake v. State of N.C. case. The State of North Carolina is requesting that the North Carolina Supreme Court review the Court of Appeals' unanimous ruling that the retirees could proceed with their case following Judge Wilson's denial of the State of North Carolina's motion to dismiss. The North Carolina Supreme Court is not required to consider the State's appeal, and has not yet informed the parties whether it will consider the appeal or not. In 2013, the State had previously requested the Supreme Court to consider their appeal before the

Court of Appeals rendered its decision. The Supreme Court denied that appeal.

While the litigation continues at the appellate level, the parties are also continuing to litigate the merits of the case in the North Carolina Superior Court. The parties are currently engaged in the discovery process, which is on-going. The Lake case was filed in 2012 by a group of twenty-six retired state employees and teachers (the plaintiffs) who challenged the change in state law that imposed monthly premiums on members of the State Health Plan who chose to participate in the Standard (80/20) PPO. The retirees contended that the state had a contractual obligation to provide a premium free Standard (80/20) PPO upon retirement to all vested employees.

We will keep you up to date of all developments related to this litigation.

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## **GET NCRGEA NEWS FAST – Get It First!!**

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NCRGEA is always looking for ways to save your membership dues dollars. You can help by receiving your Living Power newsletter by email.

Sign up today to receive email communications from NCRGEA:

- ***Living Power*** newsletter
- Weekly Legislative Reports (when the General Assembly is in session.)

To sign up, go to our website: [www.ncrgea.com](http://www.ncrgea.com) and click on the sign up page under ***Current News***.

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## **Mecklenburg County Announces Medical Benefit Changes for Retirees**

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Mecklenburg County announced plans in February to change its post-65 retiree medical benefit from a self-insured medical supplement and prescription plan to a market based plan provided by a private insurance company similar to what the State of North Carolina and other government agencies have done recently. A major driver for the county was to no longer self-insure and to better manage the costs of this plan. The county conducted an RFP process for a new benefit plan that would take effect in 2015.

The Charlotte Mecklenburg Governmental Retirees' Association (CMGRA) expressed concern about the proposed plan to Dena Diorio, the county manager, early in the process which began a dialogue between the county and retirees. The county manager spoke to retirees at CMGRA meetings in April and August. County staff met with CMGRA representatives on several occasions to discuss progress and concerns by retirees and retirees were represented in the RFP review process. The county manager assured retirees multiple times that she would only make a change

in benefit plans if the new plan would provide equal or better benefits and costs to retirees.

Shortly after the August 26 meeting, the county manager informed retirees that she had decided to not make any changes and to remain with the current self-insured plan. The county manager said she listened to specific concerns of the retirees and she intended to keep her promise not to choose a plan that was less beneficial than the current retiree benefit plan. To her credit, the county manager was very open to input from the retirees and this open communications process ultimately resulted in a good decision based upon all the facts and considerations.

*Article submitted by Jerry Pinkard, Co-Chair, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Governmental Retirees' Association (CMGRA)*

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## **NCRGEA Embarks on Strategic Planning Initiative**

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The strategic planning initiative will review NCRGEA existing organizational priorities and develop a strategic plan to advance the mission of the Association.

The Strategic Planning Committee's focus will be to advance the core mission of the Association by developing a 2-3 year plan that will increase the Association's membership and broaden the recognition of the NCRGEA statewide. President Linda Allgood has appointed Vann Langston Board of Director for District 8 as Chair of the Committee. Vann responded to his appointment by saying, "I am excited about leading the strategic planning process for the NCRGEA. We have a strong organization and I look forward to working with other Board of Directors to set forth a plan that will guide our efforts and bring greater benefit to our members and expand our membership across the state."

The first meeting of the Strategic Planning Committee is September 15, 2014. The Committee will present its report to the Board of Directors the June 2015 meeting. Membership will be kept up to date on the committees work as it proceeds.

**Don't forget to get your FLU SHOT!**

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## **NCRGEA Fall District Meetings to Be Held in Western NC**

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NCRGEA will hold seven (7) district meetings across western North Carolina in October. Our program will feature speakers from the NC Retirement System, State Employees' Credit Union, Local Government Federal Credit Union, Senior's Health Insurance Information Program (SHIIP). We will also have an update on NCRGEA member benefits: Superior Vision and MetLife Dental plans and HearPO Hearing Assistance Discount program.

Come and meet our new Executive Director! Richard Rogers joined us in July and we look forward to you having the opportunity to meet him. Members of our Board of Directors from western NC will also attend each meeting.

We will have a breakout session for local government retirees with a SHIIP representative to answer your questions about Medicare. The State Health Plan will also be on hand to talk about the open enrollment period that extends through October 31, 2014. Representatives from Blue Cross Blue Shield, Humana and United Healthcare will also be on hand to answer questions.

Registration opens at 9 a.m. Each meeting will start at 10 a.m. and end by 2 p.m. Lunch will be served at 12:30 p.m.

Invitations were mailed the first week in September to members who live in the counties listed below. If you did not receive an invitation, please call the NCRGEA office to verify your mailing address.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Meeting Site</b>	<b>Members from these Counties Should Attend</b>
Oct. 13 - Wilkesboro	Wilkes Community College in the Walker Center	Ashe, Alleghany, Surry, Wilkes, Yadkin
Oct. 14 - Hickory	Hickory Metro Convention Center	Alexander, Burke, Catawba, Lincoln
Oct. 15 - Statesville	Statesville Civic Center	Iredell, Rowan
Oct. 16 - Lenoir	J. E. Broyhill Center Civic Center	Avery, Caldwell, Watauga
Oct. 20 - Asheville	Crowne Plaza Resort Asheville	Buncombe, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Yancey
Oct. 21 - Hendersonville	Blue Ridge Community College 49 East Campus Drive	Henderson, Polk, Rutherford, Transylvania
Oct. 22 - Cullowhee	Western Carolina University	Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Jackson, Macon, Swain

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## Save Money: Winterize Your Home

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Summer is over and colder weather is approaching. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, heating and cooling account for about 56 percent of energy use in a typical American home, making it the largest energy expense. So, when you turn on your heat this fall and winter, make it count! Follow the tips below so your home stays warm without burning a hole in your wallet.

**Adjust your thermostat appropriately.** In cold weather, set your thermostat to the lowest comfortable setting—ideally between 68°F and 70°F. For each degree you lower your thermostat, you reduce your heating cost 7 to 10 percent. During cooler months, also remember to turn the thermostat down when you leave home and at night. Make it easy on yourself by purchasing a programmable thermostat that will adjust the temperature as you decide.

**Install or reverse your ceiling fan.** Ceiling fans aid in a home's heating functions by circulating air and allowing you to lower your thermostat during the winter, further cutting your utility bill. If you already have a fan, switch it from summer to winter operation so the fan will push warm air downward and force it to recirculate. The blades should turn clockwise.

**Check for leaks and obstructions.** These problems within your heating and cooling system contribute to severe inefficiency. Check for air leaks all around your home—inspect windows, doors, siding and trim. Caulk and seal all air leaks to reduce air infiltration and save on energy usage. Also, make sure drapes and furniture are not blocking air registers or returns.

**Insulate or reinsulate your attic.** When installing new insulation, use at least R-30 rated material (fiberglass, cellulose, rigid foam, etc.) with a vapor barrier, such as paper or foil. If you have an older home with knob-and-tube wiring in the attic space, hire a professional to avoid fire hazards. Do not block the eaves of your roof; these openings are needed for proper ventilation. If you are placing new insulation on top of old, do not use the kind with a vapor barrier, as it can cause moisture problems.

**Don't neglect your water heater.** Wasting hot water is all too common, so insulate your water heater and check it regularly. You can purchase an insulation kit at your local hardware or home improvement store. Then set your water heater temperature at the lowest setting you are comfortable with, but no higher than 120°F.

Taking the time to winterize your home should only take a weekend, but you'll reap the benefits of extra warmth and cost savings for months to come!

*Courtesy of the Local Government Federal Credit Union*



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## SHIIP Announces Statewide Award Winners

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SHIIP, the Seniors' Health Insurance Information Program, congratulates the winners of four statewide awards for their outstanding work in providing free, unbiased counseling about Medicare and other health insurance issues to seniors in North Carolina.

This year's awards were presented at the Annual North Carolina SHIIP Coordinators' Training Conference in Greensboro:

**SHIIP County of the Year: Harnett County.** SHIIP's coordinating site in Harnett County is the **Harnett County Council on Aging/RSVP**. SHIIP volunteers provided counseling to 1,166 clients in their county this year and reached out to more than 182,000 residents through various efforts.

**SHIIP Coordinator of the Year: Jim Burke.** Mr. Burke works with SHIIP's coordinating site in Gaston County, the North Carolina Cooperative Extension. Through outreach efforts, he and his volunteers reached nearly 146,000 people and counseled 846 Medicare beneficiaries in the past year.

**Mickey Hanula Volunteer of the Year: Joanne Clark.** Ms. Clark is from SHIIP's Anson County coordinating site, Grace Senior Center. Joanne has been a SHIIP volunteer for 21 years. This past year, she counseled 657 beneficiaries and worked at her counseling site daily during Medicare's Annual Election Period.

**Jim Long Outstanding SHIIP Service Award: Wayne Goodwin.** North Carolina Insurance Commissioner Wayne Goodwin is a tremendous advocate for SHIIP and has been instrumental in continuing to spread the word about the services offered by SHIIP since taking office in 2009.

"I congratulate all of the 2014 award winners and am humbled to have been selected as a recipient myself," Goodwin said.

"SHIIP provides a valuable service across the state, and we would not be able to reach so many of North Carolina's Medicare beneficiaries without the dedication and commitment of our coordinators and volunteers."

SHIIP is a division of the North Carolina Department of Insurance that offers free, objective information about Medicare, Medicare prescription drug coverage, Medicare Advantage, long-term care insurance and other health insurance issues.

SHIIP has nearly 1,000 trained volunteers across the state that provide one-on-one counseling in all 100 counties. For more information about SHIIP or to get answers to Medicare questions, call SHIIP at 800-443-9354 or visit [www.ncshiip.com](http://www.ncshiip.com).



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## Immunizations for Medicare Beneficiaries

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SHIIP, the Seniors' Health Insurance Information Program, for many years has built a reputation for providing reliable, unbiased information about Medicare. Housed in the North Carolina Department of Insurance, SHIIP provides free counseling to Medicare beneficiaries and their caregivers by phone and in person in all 100 counties of the state.

But no organization can do this kind of work without help from other experts. One of SHIIP's long-time partners is the NC Immunization Coalition, a statewide network that coordinates and supports efforts to reduce morbidity and mortality associated with vaccine-preventable diseases.

Each year, tens of thousands of adults needlessly suffer, are hospitalized, or even die as a result of diseases that could be prevented by vaccines. Not only can vaccine-preventable diseases make you very sick, but if you get sick, you may risk spreading the disease to others. That's a risk most of us do not want to take.

SHIIP's partners at the NC Immunization Coalition want to remind us all that while vaccinating children against preventable diseases is increasingly commonplace, many adults fail to get the vaccines they need to protect vigorous health and prevent serious illness. SHIIP wants to add to a reminder that most vaccinations are covered under either Medicare Part B or Part D.

Here are some tips from the NC Immunization Coalition for Medicare beneficiaries and their caregivers:

***Infants, older adults and people with weakened immune systems (like those undergoing cancer treatment) are especially vulnerable to infectious diseases.***

They are also more likely to have severe illness and complications if they do get sick. You can help protect your health and the health of your loved ones by getting your recommended vaccines.

***Getting vaccinated is easier than you may think.*** Adults can get vaccines at doctors' offices, pharmacies, workplaces, health clinics and health departments. The website [www.vaccine.healthmap.org/](http://www.vaccine.healthmap.org/) can help you find a vaccine provider near you. Most health insurance plans cover the cost of recommended vaccines – a call to your insurance provider can give you the details.

Not sure what vaccines you may need? The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offers a short quiz at [www.cdc.gov/vaccines/adults](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/adults) to help you find out which vaccines are recommended for you. All adults should get an annual flu vaccine to protect against seasonal flu and Td/Tdap vaccine to protect against tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis. You may also need other vaccines based on your

age, health conditions, occupation and other factors.

If you are planning to travel outside of the U.S., check on any additional vaccines you may need. Some travel-related vaccines are part of a series or are needed months prior to your travel to be most effective, so be sure to plan ahead.

If you have questions about whether your vaccine is covered by Medicare, contact the SHIP, Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. at 1-855-408-1212.

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## **SECU's Auto Power Program - The Power is in Your Hands!**

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When you are ready to purchase your next vehicle, let SECU put you in the driver's seat with the Auto Power program!

Since May 2013, SECU's Auto Power program has provided credit union members with a flexible and convenient way to purchase new vehicles. We are now excited to announce that this program has been extended to include used vehicles!

The Auto Power program provides members with a blank pre-approved check, up to a specific dollar amount for the purchase of a new or used vehicle from a licensed dealer. With an Auto Power check in hand, you can make the deal and drive away without having to contact the Credit Union from the dealership.

To take advantage of SECU's Auto Power program:

- 1) Call the Contact Center or visit your local branch to get a pre-approved check valid up to a specific dollar amount. If you call the Contact Center, the check will be sent to you overnight. If you visit the branch, you can leave with the check the same day!
- 2) Shop for your vehicle without feeling rushed. Your Auto Power check is good for 60 days, so you have plenty of time to find the perfect vehicle for you!
- 3) When you're ready, make the deal, present the Auto Power check to the dealership and drive away in your vehicle.

Just three simple steps... it's that easy!

To get started, call the Contact Center at 888-732-8562 or visit your local branch. For more information about Auto Power and helpful car buying tips, go to SECU's website at [www.ncsecu.org](http://www.ncsecu.org), click the Loans tab and then click New Vehicle or Used Vehicle in the Auto section.

*Courtesy of State Employees' Credit Union*

State Employees' Credit Union®



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## Charlotte-Mecklenburg Governmental Retirees' Association

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The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Governmental Retirees' Association (CMGRA) meets bi-monthly to promote continued relationships with friends and coworkers and to provide fellowship with fellow retirees. We meet the 4th Tuesday of February, April, June, August, and October at 9:30 a.m. at Sugaw Creek Presbyterian Church located at 101 Sugar Creek Rd. W. Charlotte, NC 28213 and in December for a holiday luncheon.

CMGRA offers a variety of programs, meetings, and events of interest to retirees. These include:

- Updates from City and County Human Resources Departments and the North Carolina Retired Governmental Employees' Association.
- Speakers and seminars on topics pertinent to retirees
- Support of a variety of local charities
- Lunch at all meetings
- Door prizes and raffle items , and
- Social gatherings outside meetings.

If you live in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area, join in the fun of an upcoming meeting! Meet new friends – and reconnect with some “old ones”. For more information upcoming meetings and membership rates, call Margaret Setzer (704) 846-8287 or Kay Dumas (704) 814-4567.

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## State Health Plan Open Enrollment

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The State Health Plan (Plan) is offering five health plan options for Medicare Primary members in 2015. These plans include Group Medicare Advantage Plan options – offered through Humana and United Healthcare – which include benefits and services such as access to the SilverSneakers® Fitness Program, a nurse help line and disease and case management services. These are the same options that were available to you last year.

**Annual Enrollment will take place October 1-31, 2014.** The choices you make during Annual Enrollment are for benefits effective Jan. 1, 2015 through Dec. 31, 2015.

**\*\*If you are satisfied with the plan in which you are currently enrolled, you may keep it and no action is required.\*\***

If you have non-Medicare Primary dependents on your plan, they have different options which include the Enhanced 80/20 Plan, the Consumer-Directed Health

Plan and the Traditional 70/30 Plan. More information regarding these plans can be found on the Plan's website at [www.shpnc.org](http://www.shpnc.org).

The fall is a busy time for Medicare enrollment, which means you will likely receive many solicitations in the mail. Be sure to look for the State Health Plan logo to ensure that you are reading materials sent by the Plan.

Your open enrollment newsletter provides a brief summary of plan benefits. Refer to the applicable benefit plan summary for more information provided by your carrier in September. In the event of a discrepancy between the information in this newsletter and the plan benefits booklet, the information provided in the benefits booklet will govern.

If you wish to change your plan, add or remove dependents, or opt out of the State Health Plan, you must do so during the Annual Enrollment period, which is October 1-31, 2014.

You may not switch plans, add or remove dependents outside of Annual Enrollment unless you experience a qualifying life event.

It is important that you make an informed choice. You are encouraged to take advantage of the following resources that are available to you:

**A Decision Guide**—mailing to your home in September. This was mailed to you from the State Health Plan. It describes all of your options, the 2015 premium costs and the process for changing your assigned plan, if you choose to do so, before the end of Annual Enrollment on October 31, 2014.

**Medicare Primary Outreach Events**—held at various locations during September and October. The State Health Plan will be conducting outreach events during September and October. Attend to a meeting near you to learn more about your options. Representatives will be available to answer your questions.

The outreach event schedule was included in your open enrollment mailer (*The Open Enrollment mailer is also posted on the NCRGEA website for your convenience*). **If you plan to attend an outreach meeting of the State Health Plan, please RSVP by calling 800-850-1992, Monday through Friday, from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.**

Please take the time to locate an outreach event closest to your home, and be sure to mark it on your calendar.

# Thanks to our District Meeting Sponsors

NCRGEA appreciates the support of our sponsors and partners helping to make our district meetings a success!

## SUSTAINING PARTNERS



## PREMIER SPONSOR



## SILVER SPONSORS



# 2014 Retiree Pay Dates

Date Retirement Payment is Issued (Date payment is Direct Deposited or date a check is mailed).

## Upcoming Pay Dates

September 25	December 19
October 24	January 23
November 25	February 25

Your direct deposit notification statement is only available through the ORBIT system. Statements, which are created when there is a change in your deductions, are no longer mailed.

## IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

NCRGEA.....	1-800-356-1190
In Raleigh Area .....	919-834-4652
MetLife Dental .....	1-800-942-0854
Superior Vision .....	1-800-507-3800
NC Retirement Systems.....	1-877-733-4191
In Raleigh Area .....	919-733-4191
CIGNA (Medicare Administrator).....	1-800-633-4227
Seniors' Health Insurance Information Program .....	1-800-443-9354
In Raleigh Area .....	919-807-6900
NC State Health Plan .....	1-919-881-2300
Blue Cross/Blue Shield .....	1-888-234-2416
Express Scripts (SHP Rx Drug Administrator) .....	1-877-680-4882
Humana .....	1-800-944-9442
United Healthcare .....	1-866-747-1014
Social Security Administration .....	1-800-772-1213
State Employees' Credit Union .....	1-888-732-8562
Local Government Federal Credit Union.....	1-800-344-4846
NC 401(k)/Deferred Comp (457).....	1-866-627-5267

*Living Power* is published to provide current information for NCRGEA's membership. Newsletters are printed bimonthly and mailed to all members of NCRGEA. Your comments are welcome.

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