

# UMRA U NEWSLETTER

*A Communication of the University of Minnesota Retirees Association*

JANUARY 2007

## Utne Reader founder's vision: a Peace Corps for the whole earth, January 23

Twenty-two years ago, UMRA members who were chronic browsers in bookstores and newsstands might have noticed an unprepossessing newsletter entitled "Utne Reader: The Best of the Alternative Press." Enough people noticed that, after five issues, it appeared in magazine format and attracted increasing national and international attention. In time it was described as "a chronicle of the emerging culture."

The poet Gary Snyder called it "the Swiss Army knife of magazines."

The quirky name of the magazine comes from the Norwegian

surname of its founder, Eric Utne. He says that his "desire to make the world 'a little greener and a little kinder' has led him on a rather circuitous career path." Born in St. Paul, his connections to the University include a 1964 diploma from University High and a 1972 Bachelor of Environmental Design. He started the magazine in 1984 and sold it to Ogden Communications last year.

Eric has been involved in the founding and growth of City of Lakes Waldorf School and Watershed High School in Minneapolis, and as a 7th and 8th grade teacher at City of Lakes. His four sons are Waldorf-educated. Currently, he is president of the

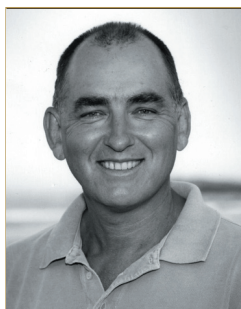
board of Sunbridge College, a masters-degree-granting teacher-training college licensed by the State of New York, and a member of the executive committee of the Nobel Peace Prize Forum.

You are all aware of the familiar litany of global crises that resounds throughout corridors of power, university classrooms, and concerned citizens' living rooms: energy, water, global warming, terrorism, war, nuclear weapons, the arms trade, pandemics, the list goes on and on. The enormity of the challenge easily can lead to despair and inaction. People throw up their hands and say, "What can I do?"

Not Eric Utne: he steps up and says, "Let's do something!" What he proposes to do is to think beyond governments and national borders. Global crises demand global solutions. Recently he wrote, "It's time to mobilize a vast planetary force of school-age children, college-age students, mid-life adults, and post-career retirees to address... urgent human and environmental needs.... It's time for an independent, non-governmental, all-volunteer Peace Corps for the whole earth...."

At our January 23rd luncheon Eric Utne will talk about the needs, what has been done so far, and what can be done to bring this idea to fruition.

— Frank Miller, President



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

JANUARY  
LUNCHEON MEETING

Tuesday  
January 23, 2007  
11:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.

**Featured Speaker**  
**Eric Utne, founder of the**  
*Utne Reader*  
"A Peace Corps for the  
Whole Earth"

**Location**  
Conference Room ABC  
Campus Club, Fourth Floor  
Coffman Memorial Union,  
East Bank Campus, U of M

**Cost**  
\$12 per person (tax included)

**Reservation Deadline**  
**Thursday, January 18**  
To reserve your place(s)  
send a check, payable to the  
University of Minnesota Retirees  
Association, to Pat Tollefson at  
4210 Polk St. N.E., Columbia  
Heights, MN 55421. Call her at  
763-781-9747 evenings, or  
e-mail p-toll@umn.edu .

(Note: Secretary Ben  
Zimmerman is away this month.)  
Reservations requested after  
Thursday, Jan. 18, will be on a  
waiting list. Cancellations must  
be received by noon Jan. 18.

**Parking**  
Parking is available for \$4 all day  
with UMRA card in the East  
River Road Garage.

**Board Meeting at 10 a.m.**

UMRA NEWSLETTER

## FROM THE PRESIDENT

As I write this column, the holidays are about to commence. The household bustle of recent days (if the activity of two seventy-somethings can be called a bustle) has included my wife Cynthia wrapping gifts and baking granola in lieu of cookies. Our children, after all, were formed by the sixties and seventies. Meanwhile, I decorated the front porch and rear deck with garlands of balsam and tiny white lights.

Four of six children in our “hers, his, and ours” group will be here for the holidays, along with five of eight grandchildren and spouses and significant others. My mood is joyful because we are truly blessed to be associated with such a delightful, lively, and humane bunch.

Included among them is daughter-in-law Awinja Otiato, who grew up in a Luhya farming community nestled in the hills above Lake Victoria in western Kenya. Cynthia and I first visited her village for the wedding of Cynthia’s son Richard Kelsey and Awinja.

If I were to write my own version of the recent book *100 Things to Do before You Die*, near the top of the list would be to hope that one of your kids married an African so that you would be warmly welcomed into an African family as a valued relative. If you happened to be an anthropologist, you could ask as many questions as you liked and not inspire resistance.

We made a return trip in March of 2003. Since the radio batteries were run down, we did not know that the

United States had started to bomb Iraq. When we arrived at the Nairobi airport on the way home, we were surprised to find it strangely quiet. Only then did we learn that the State Department had issued an urgent warning of missile attacks at the airport.

Just now, looking for comic relief, I visited Google News and learned that Robert Gates had been sworn in as Secretary of Defense. “Failure in Iraq,” he said, “would be a calamity that would haunt our nation, impair our credibility, and endanger Americans for decades to come.”

I have news for the Honorable Secretary: there is no “would be” about it. Iraq already is a calamity that will haunt us for a generation, perhaps worse than Vietnam still poisoning our politics more than thirty years after we withdrew. Let us not ignore the likelihood that the Iraqi people will be haunted painfully more and vastly longer than we.

In these parlous times family is a “haven in a heartless world,” as Christopher Lasch put it in 1977. Contemplating the arrival of our visitors, I count my blessings. Whatever domestic psychodramas are enacted during coming days, my existential condition will be joyful. If any commentary on my foibles and faults is offered, I shall express my gratitude.

— Frank Miller

## Important information concerning the upcoming January luncheon meeting

Please note in the page one sidebar that reservations and checks for the January luncheon should be directed to Pat Tollefson, Membership Committee chair, who is filling in this month. She says that if you are calling her, it will be best to call during the evening hours.

Ben Zimmerman, our stellar secretary, will be back in February to take your reservations again that month.

UMRA meets on the fourth Tuesday of every month. Often that’s the last week, but not this January with its five Tuesdays! So plan now to attend on January 23, and reserve your place by Thursday, January 18.

### **Did you know that you can invite a prospective member to lunch as UMRA’s guest?**

That’s right! And, what better time to do so, than in January when we have the fascinating Eric Utne to encourage and hearten our activist spirits?

Join the campaign for new members by inviting fellow retirees to an UMRA luncheon meeting. Let them see what we’re all about. It’s easy: give your friend’s name to Pat; she will prepare a name tag, and UMRA will cover the cost of the guest’s meal. Your warmth and personal contact will make all the difference in helping UMRA to grow, and that will strengthen our programs and benefits. Why not call someone today!

## Leaders ask: Does the University pay enough attention to its retirees?

President Frank Miller and I have been discussing the above question and thinking about a possible UMRA project to explore the issue. It might be called the Retirees Visibility Project or Recognition Project, maybe the Retirees Presence-in-the-University Project, or even Frank and Gayle's Excellent Adventure.

The need for this project was identified when one of us found that the other was not listed in the University directory, by department or otherwise. We subsequently discovered that some departments carry listings and information about their emeritae/i professors and others do not. We would like to do what we can to get the University to include retirees in their department lists and for the University as a whole.

In general, we would like to nudge the University to spotlight retirees more, and we would like to hear your ideas about how to do so. Faculty and staff are appointed by departments: is that the unit that decides whether to include a retiree? Can an effort to have universal recognition be taken through the University Senate? Or can we more effectively take our concerns to the deans and/or the central administration through the office of the provost?

While some retirees move away and don't connect with the U again, others keep in touch, at least sporadically. Many living in the metro area could be encouraged to have an active, ongoing relationship with the U. We all are likely to feel a perpetual bond with the institution at some point. Therefore, Frank and I would like to begin a conversation about more uniform University-wide policies of recognition of and involvement by retirees. These might include:

- directory and other appropriate listings and information about all University retirees in University sources;
- assurance that continuing e-mail benefits are awarded to and available to all retirees;
- an annual University-hosted celebration in honor of the retirees of the past 12 months with UMRA leaders involved and in attendance;
- memberships, or ex officio presence, of more retirees on Senate and collegiate governance and oversight committees (UMRA representatives do attend Regents meetings and certain Senate committees, including SCFA and SCEP), and, where appropriate, search committees and development committees;
- inclusion and accounts of retirees' achievements and honors in college and University publications;

- information about retirees in the University of Minnesota Alumni Association magazine, *Minnesota*;
- in general, a greater engagement between the University and its retired faculty and staff members in public events and opportunities sponsored by the University.

We ask you to advise us on how we should proceed. If you are aware of University protocols and rules of which we should be mindful or of officers, faculty, or staff who might be helpful, please tell us about them.

Contact Gayle Graham Yates at [graha001@umn.edu](mailto:graha001@umn.edu) or 4105 Vincent Ave. S, Minneapolis 55414.

— Gayle Graham Yates, President-elect

## The benefits of a national association for retirement organizations

As past chair of the Retirees Volunteer Center, I attended the third biennial convention of the Association of Retirement Organizations in Higher Education (AROHE) this October in Tempe, Arizona. I was invited to speak on the unique features of our retiree volunteer organization and its programs. In just the past few years AROHE has grown to a membership of 63 institutions throughout the nation, and now Canadian schools are joining. These include major state universities, such as Iowa, Pennsylvania, and the California array; prominent private universities including Emory, Johns Hopkins, USC, and Vanderbilt; and small public and private institutions.

AROHE is valuable to both mature and newly formed organizations because of its commitment “to advocating for, educating, and serving retired faculty and staff in higher education...to improve their quality of life and that of the community and institutions through creating new models of retirement.”

The benefits that proceed from membership are several. Identification with the nationwide community of higher education promotes more effective lobbying for retirees and information like comparisons, statistics, and surveys can be exchanged. An example: Did you know that two-thirds of higher education institutions provide at least part of the cost of retiree health care? Issues common to all retirees can be addressed more effectively with the knowledge of tactics and results in other institutions.

AROHE presents information through its web site, its newsletter, *The Next Chapter*, and individual publications.

## National retirees organizations

### Continued from page 3

Recent articles documented volunteer activities organized by members and suggestions for an archiving system for retiree organizations. Of equal benefit is the exchange of studies, surveys, and communications. In the past few months I have received these: Montana State University on retirement planning; a USC survey of their retirees who signed up for Medicare Part D Prescription Drug Plans; and the UCLA chancellor's letter to administrators on the value of their retirees and the departments' responsibilities.

The conference offered useful sessions about improving the relevance of a retirees organization, its value to the institutional administration, program evaluation, and a medical insurance program with cost benefits to both school and retirees. The featured speaker was Gene Cohen, a neurological gerontologist at George Washington University. His speech on the current conceptual shift regarding brain plasticity and aging encourages us with the understanding that we are in a "liberation phase" of creativity. I look forward to reading his books *The Creative Age* and *The Mature Mind*.

Retirement organizations are of several types. There are associations, such as is UMRA, which serve all university retirees; others are limited to faculty or staff. Some are financially autonomous while others are subsidized by their school. Some are limited to specific functions and financed by the institution, as is our Retirees Volunteer Center. Distinct from these are retirement centers, institutional units financed as such, occupying a suite of rooms or a small building devoted to retirees' social, educational, and research activities, with a paid director and secretary. Indiana University, Arizona State, Wesleyan University, and Winona State University have such centers.

I hope UMRA will participate in AROHE, a fertile source of good ideas and comparative experience.

— Alan Kagan, Past Chair, Retirees Volunteer Center

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For additional information about  
UMRA, visit [www.umn.edu/umra](http://www.umn.edu/umra)  
or contact President Frank Miller  
at 612-331-2145 or <mille005@umn.edu>

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**University of Minnesota**

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