

Annual Report

UMRA Communications and Outreach Committee

Covers: July 2022 – June 2023

Report Date: August 10, 2022

To: University of Minnesota Retirees Association

From: Jean Kinsey, Committee Chair

Re: Annual Report of the Communications and Outreach Committee

The committee's central **mission** is to raise UMRA's visibility and to make UMRA a recognizable and respected organization within the University community.

The committee's charge as outlined in the UMRA Operating Manual

Major functions: The committee's central mission is to raise UMRA's visibility and to make UMRA a recognizable and respected organization within the University community.

Committee Members: Jean Kinsey, Chair; John Anderson, Mike Austin, Kris Bettin, Will Craig, Gary Engstrand, Cathy Lee Gierke, Ginny Hanson, Kathy Jensen, Deanne Magnusson, Ron Matross, Kris Mortensen

Executive Summary:

The Communications and Outreach Committee is comprised of highly motivated and engaged individuals who exercise extraordinary leadership in furthering the mission of the committee and therefore, of UMRA. Committee meetings (4) were held primarily to share activities, accomplishments, and to solicit fresh ideas or approval of plans.

Significant accomplishments in 2022-23 include:

- the "rightsizing" of the newsletter,
- migrating and redesigning the website to be consistent with U of M software and enhancing its usefulness,
- educating members on the use of the new website,
- increasing the visibility of the UMRA presentations through collaboration with the U of M Alumni Association,
- promoting member participation in the Silver Gopher Service Corps,
- promoting groups participation in attending local sporting events,
- aiding in the decision to move UMRA Forums from the Campus Club to Midland Hills Country Club,

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Jean Kinsey, Chair

Activities/collaborations:

1. Oversees the Newsletter's editorial team and the website team; expanding the website team of IT – talented members,
2. Helps place UMRA-related information on websites and in electronic publications of other U of M units;
3. Supports the Membership Committee in its development and dissemination of the UMRA brochure and in its work with the U of M Office of Human Resources to promote UMRA to prospective retirees; consulted on a revision of the membership renewal letter
4. Fosters interaction with U of M organizations such as OLLI, URVC, UMAA, and the U of M Foundation to encourage mention of UMRA in their print and electronic literature; Renewal of the *University of Minnesota Alumni Association and University of Minnesota Retirees Association General Agreement 2022-2024*
5. Consulted with the UMRA Cares Committee about publication of obituaries
6. Encouraged the editor of JOIE to solicit articles
7. Supports URVC team with consultation and promotion of volunteerism by members
8. Supports the membership and program committees regarding welcoming new members
9. Writes Cyber Tips for the Newsletter to improve members use of the website
10. Consults with URVC and the Membership Committee to update the list serve and make it more useful for multiple purposes
11. Encourages the UMRA Facebook group to continue to provide and receive content - primarily by UMRA leadership. Gary Engstrand monitors Facebook; Kathy Jensen assists with technical issues.
12. Builds a photo library from which pictures can be used for various publications and promotions

Proposed Future Actions:

1. Continue to fine tune the website to make it user friendly, informative, and accessible on mobile devices.
2. Encourage monitoring and updating of electronic members lists so they can be used for various searches and database management.
3. Continue to produce print and electronic Newsletters that build a cohesive set of information for the UMRA community and the leadership of the University.
4. Evaluate the usefulness of projects that do not seem to have much demand and require a lot of time and effort to sustain.
5. Continue to work with URVC, the Alumni Association, OLLI, and other U of M entities that provide mutual benefit to U of M retirees.

REPORTS from selected Committee Members

News Editor (Kristine Mortensen)

2023–24 became a turning point for the UMRA newsletter when the Communication and Outreach Committee and, ultimately, the UMRA Board of Directors approved a proposal from the news editor to “rightsize” the publication of the print *UMRA News* from monthly (8x/year) to quarterly and to increase the distribution of the newsletter to reach all UMRA member households instead of just those who (knowingly or unknowingly) had opted in to receive the print newsletter mailed via USPS. Publication of the “headline edition” *UMRA eNews*, delivered via the UMRA-MEMBERS Listserv, will continue 8x/year; it comprises headlined notices linked to articles posted on the UMRA website. The benefits of the rightsizing changes include: fewer and less burdensome deadlines for the UMRA news team and primary newsletter contributors, in particular the president and president-elect/Program Committee chair; doubling the circulation of the print newsletter; reducing the time and labor required to maintain the USPS mailing list; lowering the cost of production and distribution (both total and per newsletter); and creating an opportunity to shift the focus of the newsletter to a more magazine-type publication, aligned with the changing of the seasons.

The gathering and editing of content for the *UMRA News* and the *UMRA eNews*, and for posting all newsletter and eNews articles on the website are the responsibility of the news editor, assisted by an editorial team that currently includes a paid production editor plus volunteer editors, proofreaders, and photographers, all members of UMRA. Sponsorship of the newsletter and monthly UMRA Forums remained strong, totaling \$7,500 for 2022–23, thanks to the dedicated efforts of UMRA’s sponsorship manager. The purpose of the newsletter, which was started soon after UMRA was incorporated in 1978, is to help the Retirees Association build and foster community by showing who we are, telling what we do, and inviting people to participate.

Website (Cathy Lee Gierke)

Annual Updates

Summer updates are going on now. Working with the Continuity Committee we are collecting Annual reports and toolkits, as well as the annual update of all the web pages and web documents. The Operating Manual was updated, allowing toolkits to be updated in alignment with the Operating Manual.

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Jean Kinsey, Chair

Web Migration and redesign

The web team had one or two meetings a month from July 2022 through January 2023. We met with the Communications Committee twice for review and feedback on priorities and design. Various members of the team built over 350 views, and migrated over 900 articles.

Mike Austin did a large number of the views and the migration of lists. Kathy Jensen became the co-expert with Cathy on content entry. Kathy developed a communications plan to announce the new website. Cathy and Kathy spent all day for several days, in December, dedicated to responding rapidly to editor questions about content entry supporting the first newsletter production cycle.

We continued to adjust the design mockups through November. Mockups were done in Lucidpress. Kathy was reimbursed for the cost. Minor adjustments in design, implementation and process continued January through June. One key update remains outstanding due to needing to use Max's time on other fixes – our top priority fix now is to get the UMRA site working properly on mobile devices, with Max's help. There are a few pages that are not yet working well on mobile.

Kathy and Cathy also started a new article series, *Cyber Tips & Tricks*, reviewing web site concepts and other computer related topics.

UMRA Photo Library

We started building a library of photos for broad use by UMRA for bulletins, web, newsletter, eNews or any other UMRA needs for images. We worked on selecting a storage location, writing processes to engage photographers, standards for meta-data to collect and preserve for each image, and guidelines for photographers on submitting photos to the library. We are currently testing the processes and guidelines developed with summer events.

Member Database updates with Max Fierke

Max did a great deal of CSS work for the new website in October through December. We also did functional fixes to the member database this year, in addition to the normal debug as minor issues are detected, so we kept him quite busy!! Busier than I would have liked, since he is such a valuable resource.

At the end of last fiscal year we made the decision to move to Stripe, from PayPal. This change was smooth and reliable. At the same time a couple of other decisions were made whose impact was not felt until September:

1. UMRA has decided to allow luncheon signups to be active all year, instead of just 30 days ahead of the luncheon. This change caused some confusion (see below).
2. In addition, members will be able to select and pay for multiple luncheons at once, but need not select all upcoming luncheons. This change also went smoothly.

In August the presence of summer socials on the list of upcoming events confused some people such that they signed up for the summer social along with regular Forums without realizing one of the events was a summer social. To avoid confusion in the future we added a description of each event, making it clearer what people are signing up for.

Diane Young, from the Host Committee, began working with the member database closely. This brought to light some issues that had not been addressed previously. We made the following fixes:

1. We changed the roster so when a transaction was deleted, the person was also removed from the roster for the event.
2. We built a closer link between transactions, events and people such that we did not delete multiple transactions when one was deleted.
3. Should not allow inactive members to register for Forums.
4. Allow a spouse to pay member dues or make reservations for themselves only, or their spouse only, or both, as long as they are members; can accept dues payment for a new member AND reservations for events on the same screen.
5. Should not offer an event purchase to a member when they have already purchased that event! Events for each member of a couple are displayed according to their own event purchase history.

Changes were made to the member database due to newsletter publication changes where all members should now get the print newsletter.

1. Members no longer have the option of selecting to receive the newsletter by email only, by mail, or to unsubscribe.
2. The newsletter preference field was changed for all members so that everyone except those who have previously unsubscribed were set to EMAIL.
3. Admins can still set preferences, to allow members to request to unsubscribe.

We had issues at 4 different times with key accounts being shut off. Two times emails were no longer being sent from the member database, so confirmations were not being sent, and password reset emails were not being sent (so members could not reset their passwords). These resulted in unacceptable times of compromised functionality due to delays in finding the problem, and delays in response to our requests from our account sponsor at CSOM.

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Jean Kinsey, Chair

Two other occurrences were a result of accounts being shut off, where we needed to get new accounts setup or reset. These caused Max and I to be blocked from accessing the database or website, and unable to make needed fixes or updates. These delays are because we are not UMN employees and we rely on a CSOM sponsor who is quite busy. We had similar problems last year. I think we might request special access for our UMRA accounts from Bernie Gulachek so we do not need to rely on a sponsor.

Other

Approximately monthly, I export all member database records to

Virgil for his use. I worked with Diane Young to teach her to do mail

merges

Spent some time regaining access to our MySQL database. I lost VPN access, which prevented access to the UMN server that holds our member database. Spent several weeks figuring out how to regain access.

Perform regular maintenance on various UMN accounts used for web, google analytics.

Updated our special site that we use for our Como summer social. It allows us to specify meal selections, which we cannot do with our normal member database.

I work on the (special?) Social Events committee, to assure they have access to the member database information they need for tracking reservations and payment. There are often things that fall between the cracks due to lack of knowledge, so I try to fill those knowledge gaps.

I also work on the Cabinet of Curiosities committee planning events and tracking who has signed up.

Membership Committee (John Anderson)

The communication and outreach activities of the Membership Committee are summarized in the annual report of the Membership Committee.

Liaison/Outreach Annual Report (Will Craig)

Largely due to Will's attention, we have developed a strong cooperative relationship with the U of M Alumni Association. That arrangement was renewed for another two years.

University of Minnesota Alumni Association and University of Minnesota Retirees Association General Agreement 2022-2024

The University of Minnesota Alumni Association (UMAA) and the University of Minnesota Retirees Association (UMRA) are both committed to honoring and serving the University of Minnesota. As part of this commitment, UMAA and UMRA wish to recognize and support the mission and members of each other's organization by collaborating in the areas described below.

The University of Minnesota Alumni Association shall provide:

- *UMRA members with a UMAA membership offer at the U of M employee rate of \$35 annual 1-year (regular \$50 single / \$60 joint).*
- *Category listing on Gold Mind for UMRA with opportunities to add videos and receive video statistics*
- *Programmatic opportunities for UMRA to participate in from the UMAA*
- *Assistance in other ways, on a project-by-project basis, and only by agreement of both partners.*

The University of Minnesota Retirees Association shall provide:

- *Free first year of membership to UMAA members meeting UMRA eligibility requirements (regular \$30 single / \$40 couple).*
- *Alumni Association discounted membership for UMRA members message to be included in at least one UMRA e-News (monthly email), with link to [Member Discounts page](#) on umra.umn.edu.*
- *Link to Alumni Association website (www.UMNAlumni.org/join) from the UMRA site.*
- *Alumni Association membership brochures and signage on site at UMRA events (at least one event per year.) Marketing materials to be provided by the UMAA.*
- *Assistance in other ways, on a project-by-project basis, and only by agreement of both partners.*

This agreement begins on September 1, 2022 and continues for a term of two (2) years.

Following this term, the agreement may be renewed for successive two-year periods with the written consent of both the U of M Retirees Association and the Alumni Association.

AGREED TO and ACCEPTED BY:

University of Minnesota Alumni Association

by: _____

Steve Davis, Associate Vice President of Engagement

U of M Retirees Association

by: _____

Ron Matross, President

- Access to **GOLD MIND**, has helped the visibility of URMA presentations and UMRA in general.

Fifteen video programs from UMRA were submitted to Gold Mind between September 2022 and May 2023. They received 703 Page views altogether. We have submitted a total of 60 video programs since we started sharing our programs with Gold Mind in February 2020 and have accumulated a total of 3149 page views. This outreach activity and educational opportunity is an achievement of members of this committee.

- 78 people volunteer 983 hours during the Alumni Association's Day of Service in April.
- The athletic events were run under the Social Activities Committee. Both were women's sports outings, celebrating the 50th anniversary of Title IX. Hard to say how many people attended, because we many numerous no-shows.
 - The best guess is that 17 for November 20 basketball game against Presbyterian College and
 - 30 for February 4 hockey game against Ohio State

Annual Report for JOIE - July 2022 – June 2023 (Kris Bettin)

Summary: The *Journal of Opinions, Ideas & Essays* attracted a limited number of authors in 2022-23, although readership remained strong.

Two new articles were added to JOIE in 2022-23, one relating to University history and the second was an anthology of short stories on retirement from UMRA members. There are currently 32 articles, across a wide range of subjects, in the JOIE collection. Readership continues to be good, with an average of 255 downloads per month (Jan. 2019 – Jul. 2023).

Efforts of the JOIE editorial committee were directed at garnering more readers and more authors. Articles on JOIE in University publications, such as the online *Brief*, have not been successful in attracting authors but we continue the search for other possible ways of promoting JOIE, especially to the UMRA membership. Frequent articles in the UMRA Newsletter, UMRA eNews and postings on the UMRA Facebook page were submitted to familiarize UMRA members with the journal and increase the numbers of authors and readers. An additional suggestion is that the editor-in-chief, Kris Bettin, do a 5-minute oral presentation at an UMRA luncheon, describing JOIE and inviting members to read the articles, and hopefully, write an article.

One JOIE editorial committee member resigned this year. Although we are not actively seeking new committee members at this time, anyone who is interested is most welcome to join us.

Committee members include: Kris Bettin, editor-in-chief; Lynda Ellis; Edward Griffin; Jan Hogan-Schiltgen; Mary Knatterud

Guidance Outline

Topics and Guidance

1. Why do we want to communicate
 - a. Raise awareness of UMRA
 - i. Build respect for UMRA
 - ii. Build respect for UMRA as a voice that supports the university
 - b. Show value to UMN
 - i. UMRA and URVC are potential resources to the university and community
 - ii. Members provide substantial donations to the university through the Foundation.
 - c. Entice new members to join
 - d. Maintain UMN support of UMRA
 - e. Want others to listen to UMRA's views
 - f. Inform UMRA members of activities and ways to get involved
 - g. Want to show members how to volunteer to support the university's mission.
2. Audience
 - a. UMRA members
 - b. Potential members
 - c. Faculty and staff
 - d. UMN administration and leadership
 - e. U Relations (funds URVC and is U's communicator)
 - f. Office of Human Resources (OHR)
 - g. Department and service unit heads
 - h. UMN Foundation and Development Officers (collegiate, department, unit levels)
 - i. General public
 - j. Students?
 - k. Invited speakers?
3. Content of communications
 - a. Want a consistent message across all platforms and to all audiences and through all communication channels
 - b. UMRA activities e.g. Forums, Workshops, new member invitations, social events, special interest groups, PDGR, JOIE, remembrances for deceased members, service opportunities (URVC).
 - c. Speakers's info, follow-up articles to their presentations

- d. UMRA/URVC connection (merger?) if decide to go forward with this
 - e. Convince potential members to join
 - f. Message that UMRA has value to UMN and to the public/state
 - g. Liaison and representative’s reports for Newsletter consideration (e.g. UMAA, AROHE, Regents, ...)
 - h. UMRA Annual Report to be shared with members and with upper administration e.g. Provost and President.
 - i. It was also suggested that we identify top UMRA news items to post for the UMRA FB group.
4. Communication channels - Kris Bettin’s list she created for JOIE purposes.
- a. Note the items highlighted in bold in the table below. These are the ones considered to be our primary communication channels. We limited the number of them in consideration of sustainability i.e. how many can we actually use with the resources/people we currently have.

This grid is modified from the 2022 report to reflect changes in personnel and events.

a) UMRA Newsletter	Kris Mortensen akm@umn.edu
b) <i>JOIE</i> News UMRA homepage	
c) UMRA “News” on website	
d) UMRA Luncheon Forums	
e) UMRA Facebook page	
f) UMRA new members events	John Anderson (Chair, Membership Comm)
g) UMRA book club and photo club to encourage submissions: editor-in-chief meet once per year with groups	
h) Facebook page for <i>JOIE</i> – create one?	
i) How to connect with all UMN retirees? (UMRA has email list of retirees but it has restrictions and can be used once annually)	
j) OLLI website: Add <i>JOIE</i> description to UMRA description	
k) U of M Alumni Association website	
l) <i>Minnesota Alumni</i> (print, UMAA, Alumni News & Events)	UMNalumnimag@umn.edu
m) <i>Alumni Angle</i> (online, UMAA)	umalumni@umn.edu
n) UMN clubs: book clubs, writers’ club, poetry club, etc	
o) <i>URVC Snapshot</i> (University Retirees Volunteer Center)	urvc@umn.edu
p) UMN Women’s Club	

q) UMN graduate schools, undergrad programs in writing	CLA Creative Writing Program
r) Brief (UMN e-news)	brief@umn.edu
s) Minnesota Daily (UMN print news)	
t) <i>Legacy Magazine</i> (UMN Foundation donor e-news)	
u) <i>P&A Senate Newsletter</i> (P&A employees, e-news/blog)	
v) Post notice in UMN retirement communities' common areas	1. 1666 Coffman 2. Pillars of Prospect Park
w) other UMN newsletters	

Add other UMRA/URVC representatives and liaisons as communication channels through relationships with their respective organizations e.g. Senate, Alumni Association, ...

5. Current communications

- a. Newsletter/eNews
- b. Website
- c. Direct emails e.g. Forums, Workshops, Membership committee's mailings to potential members through OHR
- d. Facebook
- e. Gold Mind – UMAA