

Oklahoma SCS/NRCS Retirees Newsletter

April 2019

The Oklahoma SCS/NRCS Retirees met at the Golden Corral Buffet Restaurant in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma on April 26, 2019. Twenty six people were in attendance. They were: **Don Bartolina, Lester Brockman, Larry Caldwell, Steve Clark, Duane Crider, Brad Elder, Wayne Fjeseth, Randy Freeland, Harry Fritzler, Sandra and Terry Hough, Winnie Jaques, Larry Jarrell, Otho Lamar and Bobbie Steenbergen, Jim McCampbell, Gary O'Neill, John and Joy Pewthers, Eddie and Linda Rathbun, Stan and Fredia Rice, Michael Sheik, Chris Shepherd, and Ed Stinchcomb.** Many attendees arrived early for visiting before the meeting was called to order.

President **Chris Shepherd** called the meeting to order. **Chris** asked if anyone knew of retirees needing prayers. **Nick Lambeth** had to have a partial amputation of his left leg recently due to healing issues; **Dan Runnels** had a heart attack resulting in a stint but is doing fine; and **Gayle Fortney** is having a pace maker implanted today. **Chris Shepherd** provided the blessing for the meal and everyone enjoyed the buffet meal.



Gary O'Neill, Randy Freeland, and Lester Brockman

State Conservationist, **Gary O'Neill**, was in attendance and provided an update on activities within NRCS. He has been the State Conservationist since 2013 and hopes to remain in Oklahoma (which is his home) until retirement. Oklahoma recently underwent a restructure because of a staff ceiling of 241 employees. Currently there are only 221 employees. Funding is available for more employees but limited due to the ceiling. Each county has an NRCS presence. The 77 DC's were reduced to 21 DC's with the other DC's being converted to

Resource Conservationists. Those 21 DC's supervise 2 to 6 counties. 19 of the DC's came from within Oklahoma with only 2 from out of state but with previous Oklahoma ties. Six zones went to 3 with 7 DC's in each. Each zone has an Assistant for Field Operations. Oklahoma is currently the only State approved for this reorganization. Other states are looking to reorganize similar to Oklahoma. Administrative staffs from NRCS and FSA have been combined. **Matt Lore** is the new Chief. **Kevin Norton**, State Conservationist in Louisiana and formerly Assistant State Conservationist for Programs in Oklahoma, is on detail to Washington DC as the Acting Associate Chief since 12/3/18. That detail is expected to be made permanent. The New Farm Bill contains funding for watershed construction as well as rehabilitation. Oklahoma has 2,107 existing structures with one new one to be constructed. There are 84 conservation districts and 77 counties. Tribes have established three conservation districts. NRCS and the Oklahoma Conservation Commission are working to hire secretaries and technicians who will be full time state employees with benefits. NRCS will be providing funding to OCC to assist in paying the employees. Next week is the National Land Judging contest in Oklahoma.



Steve Clark, Larry Jarrell, and Ed Stinchcomb

First time attendees introduced themselves: **Larry Jarrell** retired as a Resource Engineer from the Clinton Technical Office in January 2019 with 42 years' service. He is trying to finish projects at home and church he started before retiring. Also helps his kids with odd jobs and keeps his grandkids. **Steve Clark** retired as a Resource Specialist from the Claremore Technical Office at the end of 2015 with 35 years' service. He and his wife own and manage apartments in Muskogee where he does a lot of handyman work. **Michael Sheik** retired as the District Conservationist at Enid in August 2018 with 34 years' service. He operates a livestock farm,

runs a welding business, and travels some with his wife. Everyone in attendance introduced themselves and their spouse or guest in attendance.



Michael Sheik and Jim McCampbell

Randy Freeland passed around forms for retirees to provide their retirement activities (i.e. volunteer work, travel, part-time work, activities, etc.) This information is used for the Oklahoma Retired SCS/NRCS Employees Association newsletter along with the minutes of the meeting. Many retirees have expressed their appreciation for the information presented on the website www.joepad.com. When they are not able to attend the meetings, the website provides pictures, list of attendees, etc. **Joe Freeland**, retired Construction Engineer, has been very gracious to keep the website updated after each meeting. Thank you **Joe**!

We heard from a few that could not attend our meeting for various reasons. **Mark Maples** is a school board member for Bearden Public Schools and had to do some continuing education classes to continue as a school board member. He also serves as the Vice Chairman for the Okfuskee County Rural Water #2 Board of Directors, Vice President with the Twin Rivers Prescribed Burn Association, and Captain with the Bearden Volunteer Fire Department. At this time he is catching up with the honey do jobs around the house, helping his parents by driving them to their doctor appointments, and looking forward to a lot of fishing in the near future. Retirement is grand although he does miss the staff and visiting with clients/friends made throughout the years. He said many still call and ask questions related to their farming operations. And **Steve Chessmore** had some family obligations. That's OK **Steve**, we elected you Vice-President anyway. Ha!



Linda and Eddie Rathbun

The editor got a nice note from **Mary Podoll**, State Conservationist from North Dakota. She had seen a recent photo of some of the retired State SCS Staff in Oklahoma. She said, "Tell them I said hello-and look what they created. There are at least 6 State Conservationists that started or spent time in Oklahoma"! Many remember you , **Mary**, and we welcome you to one of our meetings anytime.

Secretary/Treasurer, **Sandra Hough**, said there were 306 meeting notices mailed, 7 returned with 3 updated. Correct addresses are needed for: **Gerald Younger**, Tulsa, OK; **B. Lorene Null**, Chickasha, OK; **Joseph H. Bryant**, Chesterfield, MO; and **Paul Parham**, Caney, OK. Two recipients of meeting notices requested removal of their names from our list.

Members were reminded that we collect \$10 per year from each member for expenses for the Association. They can be paid in April or October each year. There was a brief discussion on ways to cut expenses for the meetings. Expenses are postage and the cost of printing the meeting notices. It was suggested that we look at the existing mailing list and make some adjustments. Several in attendance suggested eliminating notices to those for whom we have an email address unless they request a mailed notice. **Randy Freeland** and **Sandra Hough** will work on the list before the next meeting. Retirees should email **Randy** at randy.freeland@suddenlink.net to request an emailed meeting notice in lieu of a mailed meeting notice.

Sandra Hough read a list of recent retirees: **Joe Freeland**, Construction Engineer, Pauls Valley WO, 9/1/18, 38 yrs service, retired from the National Design, Construction & Soil Mechanics Center in Fort Worth, TX; **Mark Maples**, DC, Okemah, 1/3/19, 37+ yrs service; **Dwight Guy**,

Shawnee, 40 yrs service; **Larry Jarrell**, Engineer, Clinton TSO, 1/3/19, 42 yrs service; **Jacob Worley**, Muskogee, 1/1/19; **Larry Coppock**, Engineer, Perry TSO; and **Gary Utley**, Hydrologist, Stillwater SO, 3/3/19, 38+ yrs service.

Sandra also read a list of retiree deaths since October 2018. They were: **Ed Gelnar**, 82, retired Soil Conservation Technician, Mangum, 11/22/18, retired 30+ yrs ago; **Larry Farris**, 66, Okemah, 11/18/18, 20 yrs service; **Dave Petefish**, 67, retired Texas State Geologist, 12/8/18, 32 yrs service, worked in Okmulgee WSO in 1984; **Russell Wilson**, 86, retired Soil Conservation Technician, Coalgate, 12/19/18, 30 yrs service; **Leroy Hudson**, 86 retired Harmon Co. Conservation District Director, Hollis, 1/6/19, served on district board for 30 yrs, also a former OACD President; **Loran Zweacker**, 71, retired DC, Pawnee, 1/21/19, 37 yrs service, retired 12/31/09; **Al Conradi**, 85, Baxter, TN, 4/16/19, served as Soil Scientist and was the DC in Oklahoma City before transferring to Tennessee as AC. The group paused for a moment of silence in their memory.

Larry Caldwell serves on the board of the Oklahoma Conservation Historical Society (OCHS) and provided those in attendance with a copy of their annual report as of February 2019. The purpose of this group is to collect, preserve, and share Oklahoma's rich conservation history with Oklahomans. The Oklahoma State University Oral History Staff completed 24 interviews with Oklahoma conservationists both audio and video recordings in 2018. This collection may be viewed at the website (<https://library.okstate.edu/oralhistory/digital/>). He also made available 2019 Membership forms for those interested in becoming members or renewing their membership. The SCS/NRCS Retiree group became members in October 2018. 2019 Memberships with the Oklahoma Conservation Historical Society are being accepted in the following categories: General (\$25), Family (\$40), Organization (\$50), Founders (\$100), Sustaining (\$100) a new category from 2018. Checks should be made payable to: OACD with memo line: OCHS dues Mail dues to: **Kim Farber**, P. O. Box 9 Drummond, OK 73735.



Larry Caldwell, Wayne Fjeseth, and Duane Crider

Duane Crider reported that his daughter and 13 year old grandson will be running the half marathon and 17 year old grandson the full marathon Sunday in the Oklahoma National Memorial Run to Remember in downtown Oklahoma City. **Duane** is a spectator this year having participated in previous runs. **Terry and Sandra Hough** were married for 50 years this past August. They recently spent 5 weeks in Piedmont, Missouri at Beaver Springs Campgrounds owned by their youngest daughter and her family. **Chris Shepherd** goes fishing once a week and plays dominoes twice a week. Now that is retirement!

Hobby Farmer, **Lester Brockman**, lives in Kay County, travels to see kids and grandkids, and said he does "Whatever I want to do"! **Don Bartolina** traveled to Italy last summer and says he is privileged to coordinate the National Land and Range Judging Contest with assistance from lots of SCS/NRCS employees and retirees. They bring in about 700 contestants from 35 states. **Stan and Fredia Rice** enjoy their 3 and 1/2 year old great granddaughter and attend lots of grandkids activities. They are going to Alaska in late July for **Stan's** Air Force Reunion. They volunteer at church, rodeo club, clothes closet, and land judging. We were so happy to see **Winnie Jaques** at our meeting. She works for the Stephens County Election Board and travels to visit grandchildren.



Don Bartolina and Winnie Jaques

Sandra Hough had visited by phone with **J. R. Flores**, former AC in Oklahoma who is currently the State Conservationist in Missouri. He had tried to arrange his schedule to be at this meeting today but it didn't work out. He said he is the longest serving State Conservationist in the nation with 15 years.

Harry Fritzler has graciously agreed to assume the duties of President and **Steve Chessmore** has graciously agreed to assume the duties of Vice President effective with the October 2019 meeting for a period of two years. **Harry and Steve** will switch positions after a year. **Sandra Hough** has agreed to continue to serve as Secretary/Treasurer. Thank you to **Chris Shepherd** and **Duane Crider** for serving as President/Vice-President for the past two years and to **Sandra Hough** for continuing to serve as Secretary/Treasurer since 2008.



Chris Shepherd and Brad Elder

The next meeting is scheduled for **Friday, October 25, 2019**, at the Golden Corral on MacArthur Boulevard in Oklahoma City. The Golden Corral opens at 10:00 AM so there is extra time for visiting before the meeting starts at 11:30 AM.

There was no other business to bring before the group and the meeting was adjourned.