

SamCERA 101 – basic information about your retirement benefits

The laws, regulations and resolutions governing SamCERA retirement are complex. So one of SamCERA's biggest jobs is to help you understand your benefits. This article is the third in a series containing basic information about your retirement association. For more information see all SamCERA's member publications on its website at www.samcera.org, email us at samcera@samcera.org, or call us at 650-599-1234 or (toll free) 800-339-0761.

Why do so many retire in March?

Each year SamCERA has more members retire in the period from January through March than at any other time of the year. And March is always the biggest month for retirements. We suppose it could be that March is in the spring and people just want to stop working and go play. But we know that is not the main reason. The main reason is that if someone retires in March, they receive a cost of living increase (COLA) the very next month. (See page one for information on the COLAs that members in Plans 1, 2 and 4 are eligible for.)

Members near retirement should talk with SamCERA staff to consider the best timing for their retirement. The retirement formula increases with each quarter year of age up to age 62 for general members and age 50 for safety members. So it may be more advantageous for

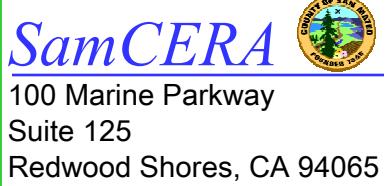
some to retire at a higher age than to retire in March. However, after the top-out ages noted above, March is often the best time.

Member cost sharing deductions from bi-weekly pay explained

A frequent question from the recent SamCERA Customer Service survey was about why there is a deduction from bi-weekly pay in addition to the regular retirement cost deduction. The deduction in question is labeled, "RET COST G S." Here's why it is made.

In 2003 the county and its unions negotiated increases in retirement benefits. As part of the agreement, the bargaining units agreed to help pay for the higher benefits through increased member contributions. These contributions, known as "cost sharing" were fully implemented in 2005, the same year the higher benefits took effect. For general members, the cost sharing contributions are an additional 3% deducted from bi-weekly pay. Safety member cost sharing deductions average about 5%.

Before the new benefits were agreed to, the general member benefit was 1.5% of final average compensation at age 55.5. Today it is 2% at age 55.5. The Safety member formula was 2% at age 50. Today it is 3% at age 50.



SamCERA Times



www.samcera.org

March 2008

Annual COLA to be 3.5% for most retirees

The cost of living in the Bay Area increased by 3.27% during 2007 according to the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics. Based on the state law governing SamCERA, which states that the change in the Consumer Price Index will be rounded to the nearest one-half of one percent, Plan 1 General and Safety retirees will receive a 3.5% cost of living

adjustment beginning with their April 30, 2008, benefit payments. Sixty-six percent of SamCERA retirees receive benefits under General or Safety Plan 1. About 350 Plan 1 members still have amounts in their COLA banks. These members will receive higher COLAS.

Plan 2 members will receive a 3% COLA. Plan 4 members will receive 2%. Plan 3

members are not eligible for COLAS.

The table (below left) shows all COLA percentages to be paid starting in April.

SCORPA leadership talks of disbanding

The leadership of the group that represents SamCERA retirees wants more participation and is talking about disbanding if it doesn't get it.

The San Mateo County Retired Personnel Assoc., otherwise known as SCORPA, serves as a voice for SamCERA retirees. Both **Bette Stuart**, SamCERA board member, and **John Murphy**, alternate board member, are active members of SCORPA and use their relationships with the organization to discuss SamCERA issues.

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Cost of Living Percentages By Plan

Plan One. Each retiree and beneficiary who retired on or before April 1, 2008, will receive a Cost of Living Adjustment in accordance with the following:

Date of Retirement	General	Safety	Probation
On or before 4/1/1974	5.0%	5.0%	3.0%*
On or after 4/2/1974	3.5%	3.5%	3.0%*

*Note: Each Plan 1 Probation retiree and beneficiary who retired on or before April 1, 2008, will have his/her COLA Bank increased by 0.5% to reflect a Consumer Price Index increase greater than the maximum COLA specified in law.

Plan Two. Tier Two benefits are eligible for no more than a 3% COLA each year. Each retiree and beneficiary who retired on or before April 1, 2008, will receive a Cost of Living Adjustment of 3.0%.

Plan Three. Tier Three members are not eligible for Cost of Living Adjustments.

Plan Four. Tier Four benefits are eligible for no more than a 2% COLA each year. Each retiree and beneficiary who retired on or before April 1, 2008, will receive a Cost of Living Adjustment of 2.0%.

More COLA information can be found at www.samcera.org.

SamCERA and County Benefits Division are different

Many members are unclear about which retirement benefits are handled by SamCERA and which are handled by the County Benefits Division, the Social Security Administration (SSA) or Medicare.

For San Mateo County employees the boxes on the right show what office handles which retirement benefits. SSA and Medicare handle benefits for both private and public sector workers nationwide. Call SSA at 1-800-772-1213. Call Medicare at 1-800-633-4227.

SamCERA

- ◊ Pensions
- ◊ Reciprocity with other public retirement systems
- ◊ Disability Retirements
- ◊ Purchases to add service credit to your pension service years such as Additional Retirement Credit, Extra Help, Redeposits of Refunded Amounts, and Plan 3 upgrades.

Call SamCERA at 650-599-1234 or email us at samcera@samcera.org.

Benefits Division

- ◊ Retiree health insurance for:
 - Medical
 - Dental
 - Vision
- ◊ Deferred Compensation (457 Plans through Hartford and Nationwide).

Call the Benefits Division at 650-363-4229 or email them at fiveiros@co.sanmateo.ca.us.

Member education options expanding

SamCERA continues to add educational opportunities for members. SamCERA offers a Retirement Workshop and a Retirement Seminar. Both offer valuable information tailored to the audience based on how much time they have until retirement. The staff also recently created a new online employee orientation video that provides information on SamCERA benefits.

Workshop - "Ready to Retire."

The workshop is for those members for which retirement is imminent. Members should attend this workshop within six months of retirement. Workshops are offered when SamCERA expects to process a larger than normal number of retirement applications, usually from November through March. The purpose of the workshop is to go over the mechanics of the retirement proc-

ess and discuss other steps members should take before retirement. Future workshops will feature a representative from the Benefits Division of the Human Resources Department, who will go over medical, dental and vision insurance information. Attendance at the workshop is managed by SamCERA staff. Members must sign up through SamCERA directly in order to attend.

Seminar - "I'm Eligible to Retire - What Now?" The seminar is for those three years to six months from retirement and is essentially a 'refresher course' on the features of the retirement plan. Subjects include things members can do to enhance their benefit and how to calculate their benefit. This seminar also features presenters from the Benefits and Health & Fitness Divisions of the Human Resources De-

partment who discuss life in retirement, available medical insurance options and information on deferred compensation. Attendance is managed by the County Learning Management System (LMS). Members must sign up through LMS to attend.

Video. "Your SamCERA Retirement Plan." New members should review this presentation within 60 days of their hiring as the information is helpful when making their decision on which retirement plan to choose. The video is on the SamCERA website at www.samcera.org. Click on the link titled, "Your SamCERA Retirement Plan." Narration is provided by SamCERA staff members.

SamCERA also has several publications discussing various subjects. All are available at www.samcera.org or call 650-599-1234.

Three trustees to leave retirement board

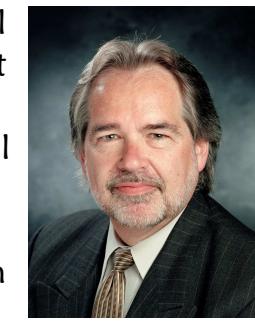
Three SamCERA board members will leave office during the first half of 2008: Tom Bryan, Paul Hackleman, and Scott Lee.

Tom Bryan has been a board member since July 1986. When he officially retires at the end of March he will have served more than 21 years on the Retirement Board. Tom served as board chair four different times and has held every board office.

Tom Bryan

He departs as the current board chair. When Tom began his board service, the trust fund held about \$290 million and has now grown to more than \$2 billion.

Paul Hackleman, Benefits Manager for San Mateo County, will also retire at the end of March. Paul was first elected to the board in June 2005. He served on the Investment Committee during the 2006-2007



Paul Hackleman

fiscal year.

A notice will be sent to all active members in April with details of the elections to be held to complete the unexpired terms of Tom and Paul.

Scott Lee is an appointed member of the board. A Vice President with Franklin Templeton, Scott's job responsibilities have changed and he will not be able to continue as a board member. The Board of Supervisors will appoint a San Mateo County resident to fill Scott's unexpired term.

The Retirement Board has nine members and three alternates. Members who will remain on the board are Vice Chair Emily Tashman, Secretary James Hooley, Bette Stuart, Margaret Jadallah, Lee Buffington and David Wozniak. Alternate trustees include Sandra Arnott, Alma Salas, and John Murphy.

SCORPA (continued from page 1)

"Without SCORPA, retirees will have less of a voice before the Retirement Board and the Board of Supervisors," said Stuart.

"Our main issue has been to re-start the reimbursements for Medicare Part B. Without SCORPA to pursue that issue, our chances are not nearly as good," she said.

Current SCORPA President Marie Walsh has been president several times. "It's time for some other members or new members to step up and help re-vitalize the organization," she said.

SCORPA's next meetings are set for March 26 and

April 23, 1 p.m. at the Veteran's Memorial Building, 1445 Madison Ave., Redwood City. Each meeting is preceded by an optional lunch at noon. Call 650-780-7259 for reservations. Lunch is only \$4.50.

To contact the group, you may also write to SCORPA, PO Box 3603, Redwood City, CA 94063.

Lots more information on the web

Go to www.samcera.org for:

- Deadlines for service credit purchases
- Results of 2007 Customer Services Survey
- A link to a video, "Your SamCERA Retirement Plan."
 - All SamCERA member publications