

2014 AROHE Conference Overview

by Janette Brown, AROHE Executive Director, and John Bugge, AROHE Board Member

The Seventh Biennial Conference of the Association of Retirement Organizations in Higher Education (AROHE) was held from August 10-12 in Minneapolis, hosted by the University of Minnesota at the newly renovated Commons Hotel, located amidst the university's sprawling urban campus. The Conference afforded 110 attendees from academic institutions and retirement organizations throughout North America the chance to share "best practices."

In the words of the Conference Bulletin, "AROHE brings together the talent, knowledge, and experience of retired faculty and staff to improve the quality . . . of their communities and institutions through the creation of new models of retirement."

Evaluations from the AROHE Conference participants included many comments on the diverse and informative program content as well as opportunities to network. One conference evaluator expressed, "Very well done! This conference is an essential source of ideas and networking for anyone associated with higher education retiree centers."

Conference attendees experienced a wide variety of interesting and creative programs exemplifying the valuable contributions retired faculty and staff can offer their colleges and universities. The atmosphere promoted collegiality and urged institutions to provide the platform for these kinds of valuable retiree contributions.

The three-day event began on a Sunday afternoon with an optional pre-conference academy on "Starting a Retiree Organization," followed by a conference orientation for first-time attendees.

Two full days of varied conference activities followed. Each day featured a plenary address, one from Phyllis Moen, McKnight Presidential Chair in Sociology

at the University of Minnesota, the other by former U.S. Senator David Durenberger of Minnesota. There was also an excellent plenary panel discussion on the general topic of Building Retirement Organizations.

One valuable innovation was the optional Special Interest Group (SIG) networking tables set up during the continental breakfast period both days. Each table was identified by theme: *Emeriti Colleges,*

(University of Minnesota), to campus-adjacent senior housing (University of Iowa, Belmont Village, Kendal Corporation), to the paradox of an increased sense of well-being among retirees (Wesleyan University).

At another innovation, the AROHE Town Hall meeting, members were asked to submit at least three "big ideas" for AROHE's future development. The Town Hall yielded 28 ideas, which were later distilled down by the board to major initiatives for the AROHE 2015 – 2017 board to consider. A few are listed below:

- There was unanimous agreement that AROHE needs to grow and many suggestions were made, including: increasing diversity; contacting non-member schools with no retirement organizations (ROs) and asking them to cite their best practices in the AROHE newsletter; offering workshops on how to start a retiree organization, and connecting via phone, email, and face-to-face contacts.
- There was universal consensus that AROHE's present financial situation is untenable, and that more revenue is necessary, if only to be able to hire a salaried administrator.
- The notion of regional consortiums of AROHE member organizations has come of age. Attendees seemed to agree that these provide more frequent

and more localized opportunities to share best practices, and that as these regional units become more consolidated, they will also serve to strengthen and extend the reach of the national consortium (AROHE). This could be achieved by AROHE members starting regional consortia with local higher education retiree organizations and encouraging members which do not already belong to AROHE to join.



Participants at one of the AROHE conference networking tables



AROHE President Sue Barnes introduces plenary keynote speaker, former U.S. Senator David Durenberger

Retiree Center Directors, Retired Faculty, Retired Staff, University Administrators, Small Colleges, and hosted by experienced AROHE leaders. The chance to "speed-network" was a boon to all and a great way to repurpose breakfast.

The afternoons packed in several sets of concurrent sessions that offered a wealth of different topics of interest to attendees, ranging from mentoring foreign graduate students in conversational English (Clemson University), to creating a photo club

- Several suggestions coalesced around the idea that AROHE should play a role in educating North American university administrators about the value of retirement organizations to their institutions.
- A groundswell of support emerged for AROHE's attaining a national presence through much more purposive public relations – advertising, social media, placement of AROHE position statements in national media such as *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, and development of “white papers” on retirement principles that will allow AROHE to act as a kind of *de facto* accrediting body for determining quality criteria for retirement programs. The thought was that AROHE might find itself in the position of vetting plans for new retirement organizations and such things as phased-retirement packages offered by universities and colleges.

The AROHE Conference program and photos are available on the AROHE public website, www.arohe.org; special resources and PowerPoint presentations are available on the password-protected member website.

The 2016 AROHE biennial conference will be held at the University of Washington in Seattle.

AROHE's membership has grown to 100+ institutions. In addition to hosting biennial conferences and conducting survey research, AROHE publishes an online newsletter and provides online resources, networking, mentoring and consulting. Major resources include the AROHE “Start-up Kit” to assist institutions in forming retirement organizations, survey research, networking contacts, online presentations and best practices reports.

For additional information on the Association of Retirement Organizations in Higher Education, contact info@arohe.org or go to www.arohe.org and click “Join Now” to learn more about a free trail membership.