

BREA Minutes

Meeting Date and Place: Tuesday, Jan. 10, 2012; Bldg. 400, Rm RSB 2

Attendees: Elliot Auerbach, Carmen Benkovitz, Victor Cassella, Dave Cox, Eena-Mai Franz, Louis A. Graziano, Louise Hanson, Carnal Hobson, Mona Rowe, Ken Mohring, George Oldham, Steve Shapiro, Richard Skelton, Myron Strongin, and Joyce Tichler (by phone)

Eena-Mai Franz opened the meeting at 1:05pm, because Dave Cox, the new BREA President, had asked her to. She introduced the new officers and thanked those who helped her over last two years. Dave then welcomed the new officers and thanked Eena-Mai for her service with a round of applause.

The minutes of the Dec. 13, 2011 meeting were accepted as amended by Joyce Tichler.

Steve Shapiro presented the Treasurer's Report prepared by Ken Mohring. Very little has changed.

Old Business:

SeniorNet: Ronnie Evans was not present. Dave Cox said that their next monthly meeting, in Huntington, would be on Tues. Jan 17th, 3:30pm. The topic is using the Google suite of programs. Ken mentioned that the Google documents can be very helpful.

BREA newsletter: Mona Rowe has emailed the contents of the upcoming Newsletter to the BREA board, asking for comments. The mailing list should be up-to-date, following the recent upgrades to the BREA database by Sheryl Gerstman, reported in the Dec. minutes.

Membership: Carmen Benkovitz said that because she lives 25 miles away from the Lab, she cannot check the BREA postbox on a regular basis. It was decided that BREA membership forms be changed to carry her home address. Every two weeks, she will send any checks she receives to Steve Shapiro to deposit. Dave Cox and Steve will continue to monitor the on-site post box. Carmen will also draft the thank you letter for Sheryl Gerstman.

DOE former worker medical screening program: Victor Cassella, a BNL retiree, spoke. He now works for the Workers Health Protection Program (WHPP), the screening program of BNL retirees overseen by Queen's College. His job is to promote this project among retirees. Every retiree is eligible. The screening may uncover a condition for which the person could receive compensation, especially if that person had been exposed to radiation or chemicals such as beryllium. Since January of last year, about 200 people have been screened. The Lab gave him the names of about 2000 retirees, but did not tell him who on that list is now deceased, and apparently will not do so. This has complicated his outreach efforts for this federally –mandated program.

Dave Cox asked Victor to be a BREA liaison to the WHPP, and suggested that he write something up for inclusion in a future BREA Newsletter.

Changes to retirees' medical benefits: The recent changes to BNL retiree's medical benefits continue to create a lot of concern:

Carmen Benkovitz voiced concern about the doubling this year of out-of-pocket deductibles for health care considered out-of-network by CIGNA. For people like herself, who retired after 1/1/2002, health care payments have always included both a monthly premium to BNL and an out-of-pocket deductible for out-of-

network hospitals and doctors. The out-of-pocket deductible had held steady at \$500/year (in other words, the 80%/20% CIGNA payments started after you had spent \$500 out of your own pocket) until this year. Now it has all of a sudden been doubled (to \$1,000). Carmen has exceeded this deductible every year since her retirement, and feels there are quite a few more retirees out there who are in the same boat. She does not know if this out of network deductible ever applied to those retired before 1/1/2002 or if it will apply to them under the new rules. She would like to BREA discuss with BNL the possibility of increasing the medical deductible for those of us who retired after 2002 in two steps rather than doubling it this year. That is, increase the deductible this year (2012) from \$500 (in 2011) to \$750, and then to \$1,000 in 2013.

Steve Shapiro brought into discussion the fact that the Lab has now outsourced premium payments for retiree's health benefits to an outfit called "P and A" (post-2001 retirees had up to this time paid their premiums directly to BNL). Retirees received premium bills from "P and A" at the end of December, without any prior notification from the Lab that this would happen. Others at the meeting said they had nearly thrown the mailing out as junk mail, since they didn't recognize "P and A", and there was general concern that many people might have done so. "P and A" threatened to cut off a person's health benefits if they didn't receive payment by Jan. 31. Dave Cox said he would inform Denise DiMeglio of the situation and urge the Lab to give people more time to adjust to the new system. Further complaints concerning "P and A" ensued: their website for on-line bill payment was less than friendly and the bill for one of today's meeting attendees included his wife, who had died in the 1990's. Eena-Mai Franz said these complaints should be forwarded to BNL. In addition, notices that "P and A" is handling the health care premiums should be placed in the next newsletter and the Brookhaven Bulletin.

Since the last meeting, Dave Cox, Ken Mohring, and Eena-Mai Franz have gone through BNL Benefits Booklets dating back to 1961. All of them have disclaimers to the effect that the Lab "reserves the right to change benefits at any time."

People at the meeting again voiced unhappiness with what has been perceived as stonewalling on the part of HR and their old Depts. when they asked to see documents relating to their retirement. (Apparently the Lab keeps two sets of files on employees – one at the departmental level and one at HR. These records are not the same and HR does not keep copies of departmental files. Departmental records are held for a shorter period of time than the ones at HR.)

George Oldham now has copies of letters of promises made to people who took early retirement in the 1990's (he represents a group of 68 retirees). He also said that his greatest fear was that if the Lab was indeed on legal grounds in instituting the 2012 premium changes, how soon and to what levels will they increase premiums in the future?

Victor Cassella brought a copy of an IBEW union contract that stated that if a union member retired from the Lab before July 30, 2006, once he/she became Medicare eligible, medical premium payments will cease. Union members who retired after June 30, 2006 would have to pay what all other Lab retirees paid. He has spoken about BNL's policy changes for 2012 with the union's lawyer, and was told that what the Lab has instituted was "legal, but not fair".

Dave Cox then asked those present if BREA should consult a labor lawyer. The answer was yes. A motion introduced by Elliot Auerbach and seconded by Carmen Benkovitz authorizing up to \$2500 to be spent on lawyer's fees was approved unanimously.

New Business:

Annual Luncheon: A tentative date for the annual BREA luncheon was set for Wed. June 13. This may be changed if it conflicts with the RHIC User's meeting. (After the meeting, Louise Hanson checked, and indeed, the 2012 RHIC User's meeting is scheduled for that week). Martine O'Connor has declined to serve this year as the luncheon committee chair. Ken Mohring volunteered and Eena-Mai Franz offered to help him.

CAC Representative: Dave Cox will ask Arnie Peskin to continue as BREA's representative to the Lab's Community Advisory Council. Eena-Mai Franz is BREA's alternate and she will go this month in Arnie's place. Steve Shapiro also volunteered to serve as an alternate.

Proposed Tour: Steve Shapiro proposed a BREA tour to Plum Island for May/June. He has a contact there. He was encouraged to organize one.

Fidelity AUI Accounts: Mona Rowe mentioned that Fidelity is changing its AUI accounts on April 1. She wanted to put a notice in the next newsletter, but was told she could not, because it is AUI business, not BSA business and BSA funds support the newsletter!

Proposed Future Project: Ken Mohring raised the possibility of BREA conducting an oral/written history project. Further discussion was put off until a later meeting.

Meeting Times: BREA meetings will continue to be held on the second Tuesday of the month (excepting August) at 1pm, under the newly elected officers. Ken Mohring has already reserved the rooms.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:31pm.

Feb. 2012 meeting: Tuesday, Feb. 14, 1pm, Bldg. 400, Rm RSB 2

Mar. 2012 meeting: Tuesday, Mar. 13, 1pm, Bldg. 400, Rm RSB 2

Minutes submitted by Louise Hanson