

# The Hawkeye Heartlander



*Picture from Planet Neutral*

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# President: Greg Snow

**Peak Season You will be great!**

I hope everyone had a great Summer and Fall! It is hard to believe Thanksgiving and peak season is upon us. The first thing I want to assure you, we will get through it as we have in the past. It is stressful, hectic and sometimes chaotic, but it is only for a short time! You are the glue that holds your office together. Always remember you are needed and even though it doesn't seem like we get much appreciation or gratitude it is there in the background. You have my admiration and respect. Make sure you take time to enjoy the little things that make this season joyous.

**FALL TOUR**

My first Fall tour is now in the past and I have learned from the shortcomings and will have a much better one next year. For those of you that came, I hoped you enjoyed the meals and the company along with the messages from the MPOOs. I was very thankful for them coming along and sharing the goals of the District Manager. I want to thank the MPOOs as it is always nice seeing you face to face, so thank you Amanda, Michelle, Wendy, Lee, Anthony, Rich and Mitch for coming. If you were unable to make it or didn't find out about the meetings until it was too late, I am sorry for that. Next year I will be sending your offices letters or postcards with the time and places of the Fall tour so you can come join us.

**NPA**

FY2023 is now in the books and the September NAP Score card is out. How did you do? Below is the approved salary increases. It does say proposed but thanks to our leaders in UPMA, it has been approved. The score card is available online and remember 4.51 equals Cell 5, which means a 5% salary increase!

Proposed

Cell	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Base Salary Increase	0.0%	0.0%	3.0%	4.0%	5.0%	6.0%	7.0%	8.0%	8.5%	9.0%
% Var	0.0%	0.0%	1.0%	1.5%	2.0%	2.0%	2.0%	2.0%	1.0%	0.0%

**Chapter Member Representative (CMR) training in Oklahoma City.**

I want to welcome the 3 new CMR trained reps, they just got back from Oklahoma City and are now ready to start applying what they learned. The 3 new CMR's are: Wanda Lenhart from Cherokee, Merri Burgart from Waverly, and Sherri Lingle from Manning. Along with these 3 new CMR's, Sara Lindauer from Cascade, and Ellen Opperman (Retired) from Bettendorf also attended the training. Dixie Bentley (Retired) from Sumner was also able to attend and she is our area National Adverse Action Member Rep, let's hope you never have to reach out to her, no offense Dixie! She is the one we call when your job is in jeopardy. Aimee Quick from Marshalltown is our most experienced CMR as she has been helping UPMA members for quite a few years and has a wealth of knowledge that always comes in handy! If you need assistance, please reach out to any of the CMR's and we will be there to help, you are not alone, we will help whenever we can.

**UPMA Training:**

Please take advantage of the UPMA Training on the National website. There is so much training available that can help you in your day to day activities and your careers. There are trainings ranging from seeing if you earn a supervisor to mitigating your NPA to increase your salary increase. It is free to you as a Iowa UPMA Member so make sure you take advantage of it. The location for the training is: The UMPA Learning Center ([unitedpma.org](http://unitedpma.org)), if that doesn't work try this in your search browser: [eupma.unitedpma.org](http://eupma.unitedpma.org) .

**Happy Holidays!**

In Closing I want to wish all of you the greatest joy and happiness this coming holiday season and I hope you get to spend time with loved ones, that is something you deserve!  
Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!!

Greg Snow

Iowa UPMA



## **Secretary/Treasurer: Kerry Nichols**

### **It's Open Season Again!**

Open Season for FEHB, FEDVIP, FSA and AL Exchange runs this year from November 13<sup>th</sup> to December 11<sup>th</sup>. Now is the time make sure you have the best options for family. If you like your current plan, you will automatically be re-enrolled. Make sure you still verify that your plan has not changed significantly, including the cost. Over the past 27 years I have had several different health plans. That is the beauty of FEHB for USPS employees. There are over 200 plans to choose from. I switched to a new plan in 2022. I did not realize that my health plan had vision and dental until I was at an eye appointment this week. I also have an extra vision plan and handed over that number to the front desk. It turned out that my regular health plan covered the cost of my eye exam. That was great! So how do you find out more about those plans? Back in the day we had to rely on the pile of plan brochures in our breakroom. Now we can read about the plans in the comfort of our own homes.

Using your computer browser, navigate to [liteblue.usps.gov/openseason](http://liteblue.usps.gov/openseason). Remember: you must have your Multi Factor Authentication set up. Local Services cannot help you with this. If you did not do this last January, you will need to reach out to HRSSC.

There you will find the Consumer's Checkbook. It is very easy to use. Use the drop downs to select the plan year, enter your zip code, and then answer a few general questions and click continue.

You will then find all of the plans available to you based upon where you live.

It is very simple to compare plan premiums, deductibles and copays.

Make sure you also compare whether or not a self plus one plan is more expensive than a self and family plan. Does the plan provide you with an HSA? Health Savings Accounts are different than FSAs: Flexible Spending Accounts. HSAs are a great way to help pay for out of pocket costs like deductibles if the health plan you choose offers it.

FEDVIP: The checkbook also has the ability to compare supplemental Federal Employee Dental and Vision Plans. If you currently are enrolled in one or two of these, you will also automatically be re-enrolled. This is the time to make sure you are in the best FEDVIP plans that work for you and your family. To enroll in one of these plans, you will navigate to [www.benefeds.com](http://www.benefeds.com).

How about a Flexible Spending Account? FSAs are a great way to contribute to a separate account in order to realize tax savings to help cover additional out of pocket costs. Do you have dependents under the age of 13? Perhaps a Dependent Care FSA can benefit you to help you realize savings for your child care expenses.

How do you change your plan now that you have found the one that will work best for you? PostalEASE.

You can access PostalEASE at home using LiteBlue. You must make your elections before midnight on December 11<sup>th</sup>. In the absence of a Qualifying Life Event, Open Season is the one time each year that we can make changes to our healthcare. Don't let it slip away!



# **VP Education:**

## **Rich Springer**

### **The Leaves are Falling!**

As I write this article, the outside temperatures have been well above average these last few weeks, but I know that will change all too soon.

We recently traveled through the state of Iowa during our annual Fall Tour, stopping at many non-member offices along the way. I believe we had 6 new members join our ranks as a result. Iowa UPMA President Greg Snow, Membership VP Sherri Lingle and I traveled to all of the meetings. Each officer gave a brief presentation of the current happenings, hot topics were discussed and attendees had the opportunity to ask questions with the MPOO's. I believe the 60 plus members who attended these meetings had many of their questions answered and concerns recognized. It is always great to see our members face to face.

During the Fall Tour meetings, we also collected names of members who were interested in registering for the drawing of the \$500.00 stipend to attend the legislative Summit March 17-20, 2024, in Washington DC. This year Heather Heuvelmann was drawn as the stipend recipient. I have spoken to Heather and she is excited that her name was drawn and is looking forward to making the journey.

Also, on Fall tour we were also able to collect \$105.00 for PAC by running a heads/tails 50/50 contest. Thank you to everyone who participated.

Our next board meeting is scheduled to be held in Florida during our time there for the UPMA Membership kickoff meeting. All members are welcome to attend the kickoff meeting. We will be focusing on setting up the program for the state convention in April. Please contact any officers with suggestions on training and activities that you are interested in having so it can be added to our agenda.

Have a safe and cheerful holiday season and remember; Tis the season for Family.

**Happy Holiday's - Rich**





# **Retiree President:**

## **Ellen Opperman**

### **Change is in the Air....**

I have been receiving some inquiries about the upcoming open season as well as other concerns about the switch over from FEHB to PSHB. I am going to give you a synopsis from various sources that I have found. Please understand that this list is by no means all inclusive and much information will be forth coming over the next year.

If you are happy with your current plan DO NOTHING THIS YEAR.....your first opportunity to select a plan under the new PSHB (Postal Service Health Benefits) will be during 2024 Open Season with coverage beginning January 2025.

If you have recently become eligible and enrolled in Medicare Part B, you are encouraged to take a look at the lower option in your current Plan. In most cases, your insurance representative will advise you to switch to the lower option with lower premiums, as Medicare becomes your primary insurance provider. All insurance carriers provide different benefits, and most provide a financial reimbursement to help offset the cost of Medicare Part B. Most Plans cover all remaining expenses, including co-pays, after Medicare Part B pays the first and majority of expenses.

PSHB is a new program within FEHB for Postal Service employees and Retirees and their dependents but does not take effect until January 1, 2025. The Postal Service will release updates as they come available to help you prepare for Open Season beginning in November 2024, and for the Medicare Part B Special Enrollment Period to begin April 1, 2024. Training videos are now being prepared by USPS and OPM that will be mandatory for all Postal Service employees and made available to Retirees.

If you have Medicare Part A and did not choose Medicare Part B when you were first eligible (normally age 65), but now thinking you should have taken Part B, keep in mind that Medicare will charge you a 10% penalty for each year you are late if you enroll now. But if you wait until April 1, 2024, there will be a Special Enrollment Period for Medicare Part B and the Postal Service will pay the penalty for you. If you enroll during the Special Enrollment Period, it will take effect on 1/1/2025, which is also the beginning date for the new Postal Service Health Benefits Program (PSHBP.)

If you are approaching your 65th birthday, the initial enrollment period for Medicare begins 3 months before your 65th birthday, the month of your birthday and 3 months after your birthday. During this 7-month period you can enroll in Medicare Part A and B without any penalty.

If you are retired regardless of your age or 64 years old or older on December 31, 2024, you will not be required to enroll in Medicare Part B to keep your PSHB health insurance. But do your homework because there could be a health care cost savings even with a Medicare Part B premium. If you now have Medicare Part A and B, you have to keep it to maintain your PSHB Plan after 1/1/2025.

The standard monthly premium for traditional Medicare Part B coverage, which encompasses physician care, outpatient services and medical equipment, will be \$174.70 in 2024, up from \$164.90 this year. Medicare enrollees may see higher premiums based on their income. For more information: <https://www.axios.com/2023/10/13/medicare-premiums-set-to-rise-in-2024> or <https://www.myfederalretirement.com/>

I hope that this information is helpful and answers some of your questions. I will continue to make available any information as the next year unfolds. There is no question that this will be a time of change for all of us.

I hope that everyone has a wonderful and blessed holiday season!

Until next year.....

Ellen



# **VP Membership:**

## **Sherri Lingle**

We have had a very busy last few months, we are going in to peak season. Fall Tour and CMR training for some of us have been completed

I (we) love fall tour. We get to see the people that we normally would only see once a year. I enjoyed the one-on-one conversations with the offices. As we drove around the state, we had the opportunity to stop into a few offices and visit. Learning what another office does for the same thing I do, such as better ways to communicate, deliver, and even helping with customer service needs. I visited with some Postmasters that told me stories of how when they first got into their office, one of the first things they did was reach out to the neighboring offices, and they all got together for lunch... I was so happy to hear this. We really need to be able to put a name to a face and grow in the Post Office together. This begins the growth of a nice network. I call it the "who you gonna call" tree. We all need one of these trees. I want to thank all the Postmasters, that do that. If you want a visit from one of us just let me know. We don't mind the drive.

Small and large facilities have the same challenges and sometimes when one office is down the other office might have an idea that can help you. Thinking outside the box is what we all do best, but sometimes we are too close to a challenging situation to think outside of that box. My suggestion is to pick up the phone, text or call someone and say anything. Really say anything. We like to hear from fellow USPS employees, and we all love to help. I also want to Thank those that took time to speak with us and apologize to those we missed. I wish we could have had more people attend the meal and information sessions. We will try something new next year, and if you have any suggestions, I am all ears. PS: Did I mention I really love the USPS family.

CMR training in Oklahoma City was a good learning experience. There are so many things that we can learn to help one another, and this is a real good tool. I was able to speak with people from several states. If you have ever thought of being a contact for others to reach out to for some guidance or need of someone having your back, this may be something for you to consider. Again, this is a nice way to network with others, some within your state and others from other states. This is one of our missions, to give each other the skills to be successful and to gain the skills to help others be successful.

I hope everyone has filled their hot chocolate, tea or coffee containers and set your clocks to 12-14 hours days. This is the season where we shine. I know it and each of us knows it. Please when reaching out to your neighboring office for help make sure to check and see if there is something you can do for them. Do not falsify any reports, scans or surveys. Do your best to get off the list the soonest you can and be honest, encouraging and kind to one another.

In January we will be going to Orlando, Florida for the membership kick off. I want to encourage anyone wanting to attend that they don't hesitate to reach out and book a room. This will be at the same location as the 2024 National Convention. This will also give me a nice break from the weather in Iowa and another learning opportunity. Please don't forget to sign up for the National Convention. The rumor has it that we will be offering a stipend for those that attend both the State and National Convention Attendees.

Thanks for all the support and love you share!

Sherri Lingle, IOWA UPMA Exec VP Member



# **VP Editor:**

# **Merri Burgart**

Peak Season is upon us!

With peak season coming faster than we want there are many things that are due on a daily basis but also on a quarterly basis.

With that counts are due. Try and get your counts done before it's December and we're busy and we want to take that short cut. Always remember when doing counts you must have 2 people the owner and another witness. Do it the right way.

Doing things the right way prevents you from having to reach out to a CMR rep for help. IA has many many great people to help just in case. We recently got back from Oklahoma City, OK from some great training provided by our National Office. Your CMR reps for Iowa are: Aimee Quick, Greg Snow, Wanda Lenhart, Sherri Lingle, Merri Burgart, Ellen Opperman. Always remember if your boss calls you and says they need a meeting with you ALWAYS call and ask for a rep to be with you if you think it could lead to discipline or if you just don't want to go in alone. It's better to have another set of ears for you.

One last thing on doing things the right way.....

It may be the "easy" way to do things and it's not always the right way to do things. Always reach out for help if you're unsure if it's right or wrong. With that being said NEVER share your password with someone else even if you're going to show up on a report. You're better off to show up on that report because someone didn't have access than to share your password. Always remember DO THE RIGHT THING!

As always remember to breath during Peak season and remember there is always someone to listen to you if you need help or just to talk.

Merri





# **Iowa PAC: Harry Healey Support PAC!**

Your legislative team is still working on bills to eliminate the Windfall Elimination Provision and the Government Pension Offset. HR 82, the House bill is scheduled for a hearing on November 20 (finally). The Senate companion bill is S 597. Now is the time to contact your Representative and both Senators Ernst and Grassley, encouraging them to support these bills to end the unfair cutting of Social Security benefits on government employees.

The legislative team is also working to get an equal COLA for FERS retirees. HR 866 and S 3194 would do that, so ask your Representative and both Senators to get on board with those bills, as well.

We also need to find a sponsor to re-introduce a bill to get non-career time you have included toward your retirement. That had been introduced in the last Congress, but when an original sponsor loses his seat, it is hard to find a new congress person to re-introduce it.

Which brings us to UPMA PAC. We raise PAC money to help legislators who have our backs stay in office by giving PAC money for their re-election campaigns.

UPMA PAC is about getting good legislation passed. And remember those legislators in DC hold your benefits in their hands. Newsflash: some of them don't care about you or your family!

## **Get on the PAC bandwagon now!**

Go to [unitedpma.org](http://unitedpma.org) government relations and get started. Or send me a check to 1219 42nd St NE, Cedar Rapids IA 52402-5734.



# **VP Legislative:**

## **Jeff Stolz**

Hello all. This is an article I wrote that never appeared in the Hawkeye Heartlander. It is a bit dated but I have been out of the country for the last 5 weeks.

This is my first article since being elected at the 2023 Iowa State Convention. I have been to state convention many times, but this was my first year attending the golf outing that was held in East Dubuque, Illinois on Thursday April 20<sup>th</sup>. If you are an avid golfer or a duffer like me, sign up next year. It is a great time and there is no pressure if you aren't very good. Just ask Jeff Arment next time you see him. I'm so very new at this but let me touch on a couple bills that are very important to some if not all of you. They are HR 82/S597 and HR595.

### **HR.82/S.597 Social Security Fairness Act of 2023**

This bill will reduce Social Security benefits for retirees. The bill eliminates the government pension offset which reduces benefits for spouses who also receive government pensions of their own. This bill also eliminates the windfall elimination provision, which will reduce Social Security benefits for individuals who also receive pensions from an employer that did not withhold Social Security taxes. Representatives Hinson, Nunn and Miller-Meeks currently are cosponsors. Those that live in Randy Feenstra's are which includes Sioux City and Council Bluffs, but stretches as far east as Story County, Franklin County, and Marshall County, including Ames, please reach out to him and ask him for his support on the Social Security Fairness Act of 2023.

### **HR. 595 Postal Employee Appeal Rights Amendment Act of 2023**

This bill extends federal employee protections against adverse personnel actions, including the right to appeal such actions to the Merit Systems Protection Board, to additional categories of employees at the U.S. Postal Service (USPS). This bill appears to include everyone that is a current EAS with U.S. Postal Service.

To find your representative go to website [house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative](https://house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative) . Just enter your zip code and poof it will tell you who your representative is.

Till next time,

Jeff Stoltz –Legislative Vice President



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**Orlando FL**

**Dates: 1/13/24-1/15/24**

**Looking Ahead:**

Articles for the Newsletter (Jan/Feb.) will be Jan. 15th, 2024. Submit to: Merri Burgart at [iowaeditor2022@gmail.com](mailto:iowaeditor2022@gmail.com)