I am honored to assume the presidency of UGRA for 2008-09. I would like to thank the executive members who completed their service last June, especially Ted Burnside and Dave Hull. Fortunately, we have a talented group of colleagues who will continue on the tradition of dedicated service to all retirees.

Unfortunately, your new Executive faces challenging external and internal environments, many of which are beyond its control. A few are listed below.

- I am not optimistic that universities will be exempted from the Ontario legislation that has increased the liabilities of Defined Benefits pension plans – the so-called wind-up pension requirements. The University has adopted an aggressive payment plan to fulfill the requirements of this legislation over the next three or four years.

- Many Ontario universities face operating deficits due to insufficient provincial funding. Guelph potentially faces an operating deficit of over $20M.

- Financial returns of our pension funds are likely to be modest in view of low interest rates, a slowing economy; and an extremely volatile stock market.

In view of these environmental factors, I suspect there will be only limited opportunities for achieving major improvements in the well-being of all current retirees over the next year. Having said this, I am personally committed to achieving some potential short-run improvements, seeking greater support for retirees from all campus employee groups, improving communications with retirees by a strengthened UGRA website and continuing the “issues” oriented Newsletter, and finally developing a long-run strategic plan that might serve as a blueprint for improving the well-being of all retirees.

So, your new Board will be busy.

Ed Herold is chair of a new Communications Committee that has the dual role of improving our website and publishing the UGRA Newsletter in order to better integrate the two into a mutually supportive communications strategy. Bonnie Hamilton is chair of a new Membership Committee. Bruce Ryan, who is our new Vice-President, also chairs our Benefits Committee and Dale Lockie, who has a great deal of experience with pension issues, is chair of our Pensions Committee and also serve as the retiree representative on the Board of Governors Pension Committee.

What are some of the potential short-run improvements for current retirees that the new Board might pursue?

1. Some retirees, especially those in the Retirement and Non-Professional pension plans, have very low annual pensions. The failure by the University to provide ad hoc annual increases disadvantages them the most. Yet, the Non-Professional plan may have a large enough surplus to finance some ad hoc increases for those having the lowest pension. I believe that the financial costs for providing some ad hoc increases for those with low annual pensions in other plans are most likely modest. President Summerlee has indicated a willingness to consider this option and I intend to press him to do so. I welcome your comments regarding this important issue. Please email me: ekgrant@uoguelph.ca.

2. There are likely to be some improvements in retiree’s benefits that are low-cost items for the University, but potentially...
Message from UGRA President continued from page one

critically important for some retirees. One example is improvements in annual coverage for those who require long-term hospital care. Another possibility involves increased coverage of hearing-aids. I will ask our Benefits Committee to continue to press on these issues with HR staff and Vice-President, Nancy Sullivan.

In summary, I have suggested some realistic, albeit second-best, goals for the coming year. Although the financial challenges that the University faces are real, the quality of life of those who served this University so well must neither be forgotten nor given a low priority. I intend to remind President Summerlee and his colleagues as forcibly as possible of your value to this University.

I would prefer to accomplish more substantive improvements for all Guelph retirees. We have not forgotten the legitimate needs and concerns of all retirees. Nonetheless, in my opinion, it is prudent to try to achieve a few short-run improvements for those retirees who are disadvantaged the most rather than pursuing universal improvements for all retirees which the University will probably reject out of hand because of its financial difficulties.

I hope you agree and I look forward to your support.

Ken Grant,
President, UGRA

On Nov. 5, 2008, the following letter from Ken Grant appeared in the At Guelph campus newspaper

Re: September Pension Increase

Dear President Summerlee:

On behalf of the University of Guelph Retirees’ Association (UGRA), I reluctantly acknowledge the University’s recent announcement to increase annual pension payments by .09 of 1% for retirees. This meager increase is a result of the terms of the pension plans to cover any inflation increase above 2% during the previous year (May 2007 to April 2008), which for the past year statistically was 2.09%. To put this increase in perspective, a retiree with a $10,000 annual pension could not afford a medium sized cup of Tim Hortons coffee with this increase.

I would note the last increase in retirees’ pensions was .3 of 1% in 2006. Since 2001 the purchasing power of retirees has been eroded by 13.6%, because none of the University of Guelph pension plans are protected against the first 2% inflation each year. In the past, the University made ad hoc adjustments to compensate for this form of loss in purchasing power. It is now some years since any such adjustment has been made.

We realize that the University is experiencing tough economic times as are many retirees, especially those trying to cope on annual pension payments of less than $10,000. However, you and the Board should not lose sight of the significant contributions of former employees in making the University what it is today, in many ways they are still contributing to the University. Recently, some have suggested to me that this goodwill has its limits!

Current employees and their leaders should take note of their pending fate when they retire. Indeed, some are clearly doing so. In June of this year, UGRA submitted motions for inflation protection at the Board of Governors’ Pension and Benefits Committee meeting. The employee group members on the Committee supported these motions. Regrettably our motions were defeated by the Board Committee members. Aside from sporadic support such as this, retirees remain essentially ‘orphans’ since no organization on campus is mandated to protect their well-being.

Retirees deserve a higher priority at the University of Guelph. For example, it is my understanding that the University of Toronto has given high priority to meeting the financial needs of retirees and thus has provided for almost complete inflation protection. If the University of Toronto has been able to do this, we are puzzled as to why the University of Guelph has been unable to do so.

The University of Toronto example illustrates that with respect to future ad hoc increases to prevent further purchasing power erosion, “Where there is a will - there is a way”.

E.K. Grant
President, UGRA

Moving?

If you move to a new home, please remember to notify Human Resources of your new mailing address. This will help us ensure that you continue to receive your correspondence.

Contact Human Resources at 519-824-4120, extension 53374 or by e-mail at hr@uoguelph.ca. They will inform RBC Dexia, the pension payroll administrator, of any address changes.
Plan to Attend!

Alastair J. S. Summerlee, President and Vice-Chancellor, invites the University of Guelph Retirees Association to tour the Macdonald Stewart Art Centre Exhibit

Searching for Home: The Lives of Lucy Maud Montgomery

Thursday, December 18, 2008 10:00 a.m.
Macdonald Stewart Art Centre
358 Gordon Street, Guelph, ON

A coffee reception will follow the tour
R.S.V.P. by Monday, December 15 to Leslie LaCelle at 519-824-4120, Ext. 56954 or l.lacelle@exec.uoguelph.ca

Free parking is available at the Macdonald Stewart Art Centre

PLEASE NOTE THAT INDIVIDUAL INVITATIONS WILL NOT BE SENT THIS YEAR
For more information: http://www.msac.uoguelph.ca/Montgomery.htm

New Buyout Package

U of G employees were offered a buyout package this year to encourage early retirement and to reduce payroll costs. Deans or Directors had to indicate that operations of the unit would not be affected by the departure of the employees. Employees were eligible to receive a payment equivalent to one month of regular pay at the time of retirement/voluntary resignation for each year of continuous University of Guelph fulltime service to a maximum of 12 (twelve) months. One hundred and forty-four were accepted for the voluntary retirement/resignation program.

This program, which closed Sept 30, 2008, was offered to regular full time staff only. The details can be found at: http://www.uoguelph.ca/hr/documents/voluntaryresignationretirementforstaff.2008.pdf

The sole purpose of this program was to assist colleges/divisions to reduce costs in order to meet their multi-year budget targets as outlined in the 2008/2009 Preliminary MTCU Operating Budget.

The program did not involve any enhancements to pension plan provisions already in place. Accepted employees who were eligible to retire (vs. resign) had to meet rule of 60 or have the 85 factor and both are already factored into the valuation of the plan. If neither of these early retirement requirements were met, a penalty was applied to the pension.

There is a similar program for faculty in the collective agreement with UGFA that runs for 3 more years. The Letter of Understanding can be found at: http://www.uoguelph.ca/facultyjobs/collectiveagreementforfaculty.pdf on page 163.

Under both early retirement programs, faculty and staff are leaving over the next three fiscal years.

Major Changes to UGRA Website

Bob Creedy is our new Webmaster. He has had considerable information technology experience in various departments on campus. He will be working with George Loney who developed the original UGRA website.

A major objective of upgrading the UGRA website is to improve communication with our member retirees by providing you with current information in a quicker time frame.

Firstly we want to create a more user friendly system so that members can write items of interest, questions, or make comments about anything that is of interest to them and have it appear automatically on the website. Once an item is posted on the website, others will be able to comment or respond to it. In short, we are creating a system whereby UGRA members can share information easily and quickly.

Considering the number of members and their considerable experience in a wide range of areas, there will be a lot of information to share.

Secondly, this system will be linked to another new system where, once a new message or item of information is received, it will be automatically emailed to members who want to receive information in this fashion. Thus, you wouldn’t have to login to the website to see the new items of interest.

Thirdly, this system would be used by the UGRA Executive Committee to inform retirees of new developments and to answer questions, etc. There is a lot of work involved in creating these systems and making them secure, but we hope to have them in place by the end of December.

www.ugra.ca
Interesting Facts about Our Benefits Plan

How many plans are there?
There are two plans. The ‘Old’ Plan applies to those who retired prior to the years 1996-1998 with the particular effective year depending on the employee group. The ‘New’ Plan applies to those who retired since those years. However, those who were under the Old Plan had the option of converting to the New Plan. The plans are fairly similar but there are some differences.

• The Old Plan allows for higher refund amounts for massage therapy. It allows for full refund for up to 20 treatments in a calendar year, whereas the New Plan only pays $30 per visit to a maximum of 15 prescribed treatments.
• The Old Plan allows for dental recall exams every 6 months. For the New Plan, the recall period is every 9 months.
• The maximum dental coverage for prevention and restoration is $2,000 respectively for the Old Plan and $2,500 for the New Plan.

What are the services most charged to the health plans?
Prescription drugs are the number 1 cost at 56% of the total costs. The next most costly benefit for the plan is semi-private hospital care which takes up 14% of total costs.

Who pays for our benefit plans?
The University pays 70% of the cost of the health coverage with retirees contributing 30%. The University and retirees each pay 50% of the cost of dental coverage.

What happens to prescription drug coverage when we are 65 and live in Ontario?
For people over the age of 65 who have a valid OHIP card, the Ontario government covers the cost of about 3,000 quality-assured prescription drug products. The University of Guelph plan is meshed with the government plan so that retirees will notice little if any change regarding coverage of prescription drug costs.

The great majority of prescribed drugs for those over the age of 65 are covered by the government which results in considerable savings to the U of G Benefits Plan.

Two months before individuals turn 65, they will receive written notification from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care stating that, as seniors, they are eligible for the Ontario Drug Benefit Program (ODB). Seniors with a valid Health Card who are turning 65 years of age are automatically entitled to receive ODB benefits. Benefits begin on the first day of the month following their 65th birthday. They only need to take their prescription and health card to the pharmacy and tell the pharmacist that they are eligible for the ODB program. The pharmacist will check their eligibility on the government’s Health Network System.

UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH COMMITTED TO MEETING PENSION OBLIGATIONS

OFFICE OF THE VICE-PRESIDENT
Finance and Administration
October 30, 2008

The Executive of the University of Guelph Retirees’ Association have let me know that they have received inquiries from many of you asking about the impact of the unprecedented global turbulence in the financial markets on the pension plans sponsored by the University and more specifically on pension payments that you are receiving.

As you are aware, it truly has been and continues to be a very volatile period in the financial markets. A combination of equity and interest rate declines over the past several years have created significant challenges for the University. In the past two years we have contributed over $80 million dollars to our pension plans to maintain their positive financial positions. Our commitment is that all of our pension plans are and will continue to meet our pension obligations to our retirees. As we look forward, our concern is focussed on the next pension valuation date of August 1, 2010. At that time, under current provincial legislation we are required to measure our contribution obligations. If markets do not recover significantly or provincial rules do not change, we will be faced with further significant contribution requirements. We are working carefully with the pension plans’ actuaries to determine the impact on the University and are preparing plans for such a possibility.

While we cannot predict where markets will go, we remain committed to meeting all of the obligations to our retirees.

I will work with UGRA to respond to any questions that they receive from members.

Yours truly,
Nancy Sullivan
Vice-President (Finance and Administration)
Pension Committee
In October, 2007 the CURAC Pension Committee presented a detailed brief to the Ontario Expert Commission on Pension Reform (www.pensionreview.on.ca). Its mandate is to analyze the Pension Benefits Act with a focus on defined benefit pensions and provide advice for amended legislation. The CURAC brief consisted of 20 detailed recommendations and focused on three questions.

How can pension regulation be restructured to promote outstanding long-term investment performance of pension funds?
How can pension regulation best promote full indexation of pension entitlements?

Benefits Committee
The CURAC Benefits Committee is conducting a national survey of benefits provided to membership groups.

Membership Committee
There are 36 members from 31 Canadian universities.

Health Care Policy Committee
This committee publishes discussion papers and organizes symposia on aspects of seniors’ health care. In Montreal, it organized a session on seniors and mental health.

More information about CURAC and university retiree organizations from across Canada can be found at www.curac.ca
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH RETIREES ASSOCIATION (UGRA) 2008-2009

Past President: Ted Burnside
tedburnside@sentex.ca

President: Ken Grant
ekgrant@uoguelph.ca

Vice-President & Benefits Chair: Bruce Ryan
bryan102@gmail.com

Secretary: Ron MacKinnon
rmk@uoguelph.ca

Treasurer: Clinton Martin

Chair, Pensions Committee: Dale Lockie
d.lockie@sympatico.ca

Chair, Communications Committee: Ed Herold
eherold@uoguelph.ca;

Chair, Membership Committee: Bonnie Hamilton
bhamilt@uoguelph.ca

Chair, Scholarship Committee: Joe Mokanski
jmokansk@uoguelph.ca

Executive Members: John Holt
jholt@uoguelph.ca
Phil Keddie

UGRA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE FOR 2008-2009

At Back, Left to Right: Clinton Martin, Joe Mokanski, Ken Grant, Bruce Ryan, Dale Lockie
At Front, Left to Right: John Holt, Bonnie Hamilton, Phil Keddie, Ron MacKinnon, Ed Herold
Missing: Ted Burnside

Activities of the UGRA Executive

The University of Guelph Retirees’ (UGRA), representing both retired faculty and staff, was formed in 1991. It now comprises a community of over 1700 persons. While the matter of pensions was the main stimulus for the formation of the Association and continues to be a major focus of concern, the Association has expanded its activities to include a wide range of other issues important to retirees. These activities include:

- Meetings with the University’s senior administrators to discuss topics of concern including pensions, benefits and other privileges;
- Publishing a newsletter sent to all retirees twice a year. The newsletter addresses a range of topics of interest to Association members;
- Participation with the College and university Retirees’ Association of Canada (http://www.curac.ca/index.htm) which is a very useful source of information concerning the challenges facing retirees across Canada;
- Creating and maintaining a very useful web site for University of Guelph Retirees (http://www.ugra.ca/) that offers archives of past newsletters, minutes of the Executive Committee meetings since 2002, links to other useful resources and valuable contact information;
- Sponsoring and funding a UGRA undergraduate scholarship for students who are a child, grand-child or great-grand-child of a U of G retiree.

Recent Retirees

Blair Capes
Student Housing Serv
June 1, 2008

James Macneil
Phys Res-Custodial
June 1, 2008

Bernhard Nickel
Physics
June 1, 2008

Doug Bach
RC-Academic
July 1, 2008

Eleanor Chu
Math & Statistics
July 1, 2008

Elizabeth Fabri
Lsd-Analytical Serv
July 1, 2008

John Leatherland
Biomedical Sciences
July 1, 2008

Bonita Snider
Physics
July 1, 2008

Gloria Bartlett
Hospitality Services
Aug. 1, 2008

Phyllis Carnochan
Distance Ed
Aug. 1, 2008

Gary Feltz
Phys Res-Mechanical
Aug. 1, 2008

Betty Hill
Human Resources
Aug. 1, 2008

Bonnie Patteson
Co-Op Educ Services
Aug. 1, 2008

Wing Poon
Phys Res-Cup
Aug. 1, 2008

Diane E. Paul
RC-Academic
Aug. 1, 2008

Robert Brooks
Physics
Sept. 1, 2008

William Christian
Political Science
Sept. 1, 2008

Brian Earn
Psychology
Sept. 1, 2008

Diane Leblanc
Student Health Service
Sept. 1, 2008

Suzanne Lake
Sch Fine Art & Music
Sept. 1, 2008

Frederick T Morgan
Kc-Cont Education
Sept. 1, 2008

John Pratschke
Mktg & Consumer Stdy
Sept. 1, 2008

Mark Sears
Environment Biology
Sept. 1, 2008

Judith Strommer
Pa-Bovey Bldg
Sept. 1, 2008

Paul Voparil
Phys Res-Custodial
Sept. 1, 2008

William Woodward
Human Hlth&Nutri Sci
Sept. 1, 2008

Julia Zilka
Pa-Crop Sci Bldg
Sept. 1, 2008

Larry T. Frost
Pa-Simcoe
Oct. 1, 2008

Graham Nancekivell
Integrative Biology
Oct. 1, 2008

Liliana Ranalli
Pr/Shs Environ Serv
Oct. 1, 2008

Deceased Retirees

Mary Miller
Oct. 18, 2008

Stanley M. Clayton
Oct. 12, 2008

Constance Rooke
Oct. 4, 2008

David Davies
Sept. 27, 2008

Franklin Stewart
Sept. 12, 2008

Sophie Bonikowsky
Sept. 11, 2008

Olgers Mniats
July 22, 2008

Eunice French
July 5, 2008

Mary I. Gerrie
July 4, 2008

Majorie E. Towers
June 28, 2008

Samuel Zelin
June 28, 2008

Maurice V. Smith
June 17, 2008

Joseph M. Stepien
May 23, 2008

Denise Billings
May 15, 2008
UGRA Annual General Meeting Highlights

The annual general meeting of the University of Guelph Retirees Association was held in Rozanski Hall, University of Guelph on June 13, 2008

Benefits

The UGRA Benefits Committee met several times with administration officials regarding the benefits package available to retirees. We have learned that there will be no changes to the coverage or the cost to us for the coming year. Administration officials agreed to consult with the committee annually during the fall. Also, the President of the UGRA and Chair of the Benefits Committee may also meet with the Vice-President Finance and Administration and her designate annually in the spring to discuss any issues which the Benefits Committee wishes to bring to the senior Administration. We were not successful in obtaining improvements to the coverage in two areas where we felt we had fallen behind the benefits available in comparable universities: the limit of 180 days for a semi-private hospital room per illness, and the limit of $300 every five years for hearing aid costs.

There is a great variation in the level of benefits available to retirees in Canada. We have recently contributed to a CURAC national survey regarding university retiree benefits. Results of the survey should be available in 2009.

Pensions

The UGRA has continued to present the university administration with a well-reasoned case for improved indexation of retiree pensions.

President’s Luncheon for Retirees

The annual retirees luncheon followed the Annual Meeting. Sponsored by the university president, Dr. Alastair Summerlee, the luncheon was a most pleasant occasion. More than 700 retirees and their guests had an enjoyable time socializing with former colleagues and friends.

Be a Contributing Member of UGRA

All retirees are automatically members of the University of Guelph Retirees Association, but our capacity to operate effectively on behalf of retirees depends on members volunteering to become Contributing Members. This money covers the costs of the newsletter, scholarships, meeting room rentals and support for a member of the UGRA to attend the annual meeting of the College and University Retirees Association of Canada.

Many of you have already sent us your voluntary contribution for the period April, 2008 - March 31, 2009 and are registered as Contributing Members. For the convenience of those who have not yet done so but wish to, we have reprinted the Contributing Member form. We have asked for a contribution of $20 but always appreciate those members who add some extra funds to help us carry on the work.

Scholarship Award

UGRA offers a $1,500 scholarship to full time students who are related to a U of G retiree as a child, grandchild or great grandchild. The scholarship emphasizes academic achievement but also considers financial need. Please inform anyone in your family who may qualify, about the existence of this UGRA award.

Are seniors taking too many prescription drugs?

At the Montreal CURAC conference, physicians specializing in geriatric medicine expressed concern over the large number of prescription drugs that many seniors are taking today. Seniors are more likely to experience negative side effects from prescription drugs than are younger adults. The interactions resulting from taking several drugs can compound these harmful side effects and result in serious medical problems. Unfortunately, few physicians in Canada receive training in geriatric medicine and thus many are unaware of how prescription drugs can differentially affect seniors — especially when a number of drugs are taken together.

Newsletter Changes

As we are giving major priority to using our website and e-mail to strengthen our communications with retirees, the Executive Committee has made the decision to move from publishing three issues of the newsletter to publishing two issues per year.
FLORIDA RETIREES’ RE-UNION

PLAN TO ATTEND!

The Florida Alumni Reunion of Guelph University will be held between 10:00 AM and 2:00 PM, on March 4, 2009 in Port Charlotte at the Maple Leaf Golf and Country Club (Queensway Hall, a new, roomy, and well-equipped facility). The cost of $20.00/person includes a substantial buffet lunch with beverages and wine. You can pay at the door but you must make a reservation so that food and drink can be properly provided. Make your reservation with Lyle Rea WLREA@comcast.net or phone 941 505 0183 by March 1st. Come enjoy this happy event, hearing the latest information on the University of Guelph, visiting alumni, renewing acquaintances, and participating in gift-winning draws.

The West Florida Guelph Alumni Reunion Committee is sponsoring the 3rd Annual Guelph Alumni Boat Cruise on February 7, 2009. The cruise will be on Charlotte Harbor leaving The Kingfisher dock in Punta Gorda FL at 10:00 AM and returning at 3:00 PM. The boat is owned by the Kingfisher Fleet which has been voted the best of charter boats in Charlotte Harbor for each of the last 12 years. Enjoy the 1½ hour narrated tour of the Charlotte Harbor aquatic preserve watching for dolphins, fish, and birds, followed by going ashore for lunch, if you want it, in Porto Bellos restaurant at the Burnt Store Marina and return to the Kingfisher dock at 3:00 p.m.

The cost is $25 per person (lunch extra). Send your reservation, telephone number (to reach you in case of rain), and money by February 4 to Bert Mitchell, 5186 Cote du Rhone Way, Sarasota, FL 34238. His e-mail address is bert.mitchell@earthlink.net