

Domestic Partner Legislation Puts Benefit Possibilities in Place

Effective January 2005, domestic partners *formally registered* with the State of California will be eligible for the same benefits and rights of survivorship currently available to spouses. The California Domestic Partner Rights and Responsibilities Act of 2003 amends a variety of statutes, including Section 297 of the Family Code and sections of the '37 Act, but **requirements for partners are very specific**. These new rights come with new responsibilities, *and* new paperwork that must be completed before domestic partner status can be recognized.



One important aspect for CCCERA members is Section 3B of the Family Code (297) which reads in part, “. . . persons of *opposite* sexes may not constitute a domestic partnership unless one or both of the persons are over the age of 62.” A domestic partner of a member who is (or will) retire will not qualify unless the partnership is registered with the Secretary of State at least one year prior to retirement. This qualification reflects Section 31760.1 of the '37 Act regarding survivor benefits: “No allowance, however, shall be paid under this section to a surviving spouse (domestic partner) unless he or she was married (registered with the Secretary of State) to the member at least one year prior to the date of his or her retirement.”

For complete information on these landmark amendments see www.leginfo.ca.gov/ and search by the bill numbers above. By January 2005 (the bill's effective date) CCCERA will have the necessary tools in place to guide members interested in exploring these options for their partners and beneficiaries. You may also want to consult with an attorney or financial planner on individual situations.

Buying Time: *Medical* Leave of Absence (LOA) Purchases

The phrase “leave of absence” might be interpreted as any time spent away from your job. But within the confines of the '37 Act, the phrase has a strict definition: **absence from your job for documented medical reasons only**. The statute (31646.) allows members to “purchase” this leave of absence time if the time spent away from work is uncompensated (you were not paid by your employer; therefore, you did not make contributions to your retirement account during your illness).

Purchasing LOA time means paying the contributions plus interest that would have been deposited in your retirement account if you had been in active pay status. This turns your LOA time into service credit. The contributions can be paid in a lump sum, or by monthly contract. The law allows the same amount of time to pay your contributions as you were on leave. For example, if you were on a medical leave of absence for two months, you have two months to complete your payments. However, service credit cannot be granted for any LOA period that exceeds 12 consecutive months.

The '37 Act defines other categories of time that may be purchasable, thereby adding to your retirement service credit. These include military time and certain types of public service. But each situation is different, requiring careful analysis of the regulations and computation of purchase amounts. Call CCCERA to speak with a counselor for complete information on the process.

CCCERA Board Welcomes New, Returning Trustees for 2004

CCCERA Board of Trustee elections concluded by retaining incumbent Brian Hast as General Member representative. Concurrently, the County Board of Supervisors reappointed Maria Theresa Viramontes to her seat. Hast, a Deputy District Attorney for Contra Costa County, has been a board member since 1998. Viramontes, Executive Director of the Richmond Children's Foundation, is returning for her second term on CCCERA's board. Each board trustee will serve a term of three years, with no term limits.

Helen Shea, who served for eighteen years as a board trustee, initially represented active members and later retired members. She chose not to run this year, vacating the retiree representative seat. In addition, AB1587 (effective January 2004) established an additional "alternate" retiree representative seat. Retirees elected Jerry Telles as their primary representative and Sharon Naramore to fill the newly created position of alternate retiree representative.

New Retiree Representative Jerry Telles

Jerry Telles was a supervisor in the Probation Department until he retired in 1999. Currently, he is the chairperson for the Retirees Support Group of Contra Costa County, a "grass roots" organization that works in non-partisan fashion to create solutions to issues important for all retirees.

"I became interested in serving CCCERA after attending meetings and observing the dynamics of the Board," says Telles. "Over time, I hope to protect and perhaps enhance benefits for retirees."

Although retirement board members may be elected or appointed by certain groups within the association (general, safety, retirees), the trustees' mandate is the security and integrity of the fund for all members: employers, active members and retirees alike.

New Alternate Retiree Trustee Sharon Naramore

Sharon Naramore previously served CCCERA from 1992 to 1998, as a general member representative. Her career with Contra Costa County spanned 34 years with the library system. As new alternate trustee, she will vote only when the retiree representative is absent.

"My past board experience and knowledge of fiduciary responsibility will be an asset as I serve the fund," says Naramore. "I want to make sure our benefits are in place for current and future retirees."

CCCERA office hours are
8 a.m.-12 p.m.,
12:30 p.m.-5:00 p.m.,
Monday through Friday.
After regular business
hours, voicemail is
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