

RETIREE NOTES



Retiree Spotlight: Park Ranger Walt Garrison

WALT GARRISON RETIRED LAST AUGUST AFTER NEARLY 40 YEARS SERVING THE STATE OF ILLINOIS. A member of AFSCME Local 1048, Garrison spent his public service career at the Wayne Fitzgerald State Recreation Area. Starting out as a maintenance worker, Garrison was a

park ranger for 13 years and ended his career as an assistant site superintendent.

Garrison's favorite part of his job was dealing with the public and working outdoors every day. The 1300-acre Fitzgerald Park overlooks Rend Lake Reservoir. With 245 camping sites, it's a gem in Southern Illinois, perfect for hunting, fishing, swimming, birding and hiking.

"I was in the campground a lot and got to deal with people from all over the country, even people from around the world," Garrison said.

Budget woes

ONE OF THE MOST CHALLENGING experiences of his career, Garrison said, came just before he retired. The state had no budget in place to allow for maintenance on equipment, facilities and buildings.

"As we know, our governor is not an ally for working people. But really, without a budget I just don't understand

how they expect these parks to operate," Garrison said.

"The state is pushing tourism but they don't maintain parks the way they should be," he said. "There should be upgrades for water hydrants, electrical work, shower buildings."

A dream realized

GARRISON HAD WANTED TO BE a park ranger since high school and he feels fortunate to have achieved his dream.

"I got to work the job that I wanted to do all along. I got to do something that I really enjoyed, be outdoors and be around people."

Some of those people are co-workers who remain close friends—"the camaraderie was really unique"—and are now enjoying their retirement together.

The union difference

"WHEN I STARTED, WE weren't covered under a col-

State Plan Shifts to Aetna

AFSCME retirees in the State of Illinois group health plan who have Cigna as their insurance carrier were switched by the state to Aetna on May 31, 2017. Illinois' contract with Cigna expired, and the state chose Aetna in a competitive bidding process. If you received a letter regarding this change, your insurance plan costs and benefits remain the same. But under Aetna's network, your current physicians may not be in-network. You can check if your physicians are in-network under Aetna by calling 855-339-9731 or visiting aetnastateofillinois.com.

lective bargaining agreement," Garrison said.

"Things were a lot different back then. They didn't have to offer overtime based on seniority, people hadn't received raises, and management treated you like you were a second-class citizen."

Garrison said being part of a union is critical for job security, to fight off privatization of jobs, for decent health insurance and for a worker's ability to retire.

"I really enjoyed my career," Garrison said. "Not everybody can say that they can get up every day and enjoy going to work."

Rauner undercuts program for vulnerable seniors

GOV. BRUCE RAUNER HAS PROPOSED CREATING A PROGRAM CALLED THE COMMUNITY Reinvestment Program, which will cut \$120 million from the Community Care Program that allows seniors to stay safe and healthy in their own homes.

Rauner's plan risks leaving 36,000 Illinois seniors with nowhere to turn but a nursing home for care.

In response, Illinois House Democrats are pushing bills to preserve community-based services for the elderly—HB 1424, sponsored by State Representative Anna Moeller, and SB 399, sponsored by State Senator Dan Biss.

"We are fed up with Gov. Rauner's attacks on senior citizens," said Barbara Franklin, President of the Illinois Alliance for Retired Americans.

"That is why we are standing with our allies in support of House Bill 1424 to ensure that the Community Care Program continues to keep elderly Illinoisans in their homes as long as possible. Every senior deserves to receive the full care that they need."

A sad day for affordable health care

ON MAY 4, THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES PASSED HR 1628, WHICH WOULD REPEAL and purportedly replace the Affordable Care Act (ACA).

The bill allows states to waive insurance protections for pre-existing conditions and removes caps that protect older individuals from inflated insurance costs. The legislation also cuts funding for Medicaid and endangers the solvency of the critical program by also cutting the high-earner Medicare tax.

Every Republican Congressman in Illinois voted yes for HR 1628, despite the fact that there was no budget analysis available. Instead of analyzing the bill and listening to constituents, those Illinois congressmen dodged town halls and ignored thousands of phone calls from constituents worried about losing their health care.

This harmful bill is currently under consideration in the Senate where Illinois Senators Duckworth and Durbin are working for its defeat.



Sub-Chapter 87 Hillsboro (top) and Sub-Chapter 77 Galesburg members gather together.