



# COPRA CHRONICLE

JAN 2026 | ISSUE 1

Issued by and for:  
**City of Phoenix  
Retirees Association,**  
your advocate in pension  
and insurance matters.

## MEMBERSHIP IS OUR STRENGTH

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### SAVE THE DATE

**Spring General Membership Meeting**  
Thursday March 12, 2026 | 10am- noon  
More details coming soon!



### MEMBERSHIP

#### Membership dues for COPRA:

\$12 per year or \$50 for 5 years or \$100 for lifetime

If you have changed your address or phone number, or have any questions about membership due payments, please contact Anna Dragonetti at 602-992-0362 or [copra.members@gmail.com](mailto:copra.members@gmail.com)

Mail payments to:  
COPRA  
PO Box 2464  
Litchfield Park, Az 85340  
Or PayPal to:  
[phoenixcopra@gmail.com](mailto:phoenixcopra@gmail.com)

Thank you to all our members who attended the December 5th Holiday Party and brought toys for the Phoenix Head Start Program! As you can see from the pictures, our tables were overflowing with toys. Many of you brought 2, 3 or more gifts for the kiddos.

Thank you so much for your generosity! Head Start was thrilled and I'm sure we'll hear more about it in a future Chronicle.

**Thanks again! COPRA members are always so very generous! You've helped to making a Happy Holiday season to those in need, and you are appreciated!**

#### Reminders to all COPRA members:

If your membership expired on Dec 31, 2025 it is up for renewal:

Our dues are as always:  
**\$12 for one year, \$50 for five years or \$100 for lifetime**

**Need to update your info?** Please send an email to [copra.members@gmail.com](mailto:copra.members@gmail.com) to update your data record if you have any changes to email address, phone number, mailing address or spouse survivor.



Board meetings are held monthly on the 2nd Thursday of the month, except June, July and August.

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By Rob Sweeney

Happy New Year! We have collectively made it to the Year 2026! This sounds like a quote from a sci-fi movie from the 50's. Wow – we made it!

It was a pleasure to see many of you at the Holiday Luncheon/General Membership Meeting in December. As always, Sharko's catering did a fantastic job with the food and the COPRA Board made the event special. Thank you to Kathy Wenger for organizing the event and working with COP Head Start to donate the many-many-many gifts donated by our fellow members. What a special day!

We held our board elections and welcome Colleen Ostrander to the Board. We are saying a sad goodbye to Mary Jo Slunder, who has opted to not seek reelection to spend time with family. Mary Jo was a pillar of support for COPRA: she raised her hand to perform any task, role or need and completed them with grace and effectiveness. THANK YOU, Mary Jo! You will be missed at Board meetings but we hope to see your smiling face at all COPRA events.

Elections for Board executive positions are this month. Your current Board will vote on the positions of President, Vice President, Treasurer and Secretary at the January meeting. All are welcome to attend. Whatever the outcome, you will have a dedicated Board Member working on your behalf.

When dreaming about what to write for the Chronicle, my mind always drifts to family. I am blessed to be part of a large family who married 'smart' and added joy to the Sweeney clan.

I am the last of seven children. Seventeen years separate my oldest sister and me.

The neighborhood rumor when I was born was that my sister Kathy was my mother! I can confirm the rumor is NOT true!

Due to my age, I never met any of my grandfathers. They all passed before I was born.

My mother's mom, Grandma Spitz, was a gem! She was a woman of faith and treated all with the respect of a King/Queen. In between reading her prayer cards she made time to have fun. She made up songs: 'Robby oh gobby, don't make yourself so slobby....' My love of making up lyrics continues in her honor.

My father's mom, Grandma Blackman, had to put her children in a Chicago orphanage when her husband died at the height of the Depression. She remarried and recalled the children to raise a beautiful family. She was a skilled medical nurse who settled in the Mission Hills neighborhood of San Diego after her children moved away.

What I am telling you now is due to family stories and historical records since I was too young to understand or remember her all that well. My sisters tell me she was so joyful and funny to be around. Unfortunately, I remember a darker side that I could not comprehend as a 6-year-old.

I learned in my young adulthood that Grandma Blackman suffered from dementia and then Alzheimer's. Unfortunately, I only knew her as 'mean.' I learned this was not a trait of hers, but a response to the disease. She tried to control the youngest in the room with words and actions because she did not know what else to do. Even today, I struggle to reconcile my thoughts and reactions towards her as a young child. My late father, mom, aunts, uncles and siblings helped fill in the gaps as to her true self and wonderful personality.

I personally know many of you have and/or continue to endure the struggles of a loved one living with dementia or Alzheimer's. God Bless! I was hoping that this horrid, mind-robbing disease would skip at least one generation in my family. This was not to be.

The youngest of my four sisters, Peggy, is an RN and former trauma 1 ER nurse at St. Joe's in Phoenix. She followed my Grandma Blackman into the beautiful profession of nursing; caring for others who otherwise cannot care for themselves. She did this beautifully while raising a family of three children with her husband Joe. Yet again, a rock-solid family! Peggy met me in downtown Phoenix about 12 years ago while she was on jury duty. I 'splurged' to buy her lunch at Sticklers. She shared with me she was going to retire. I was happy for her and Joe; they could begin the journey of travels and focus of family.

A couple of years later, Peggy shared with me that she left the nursing profession because she recognized she was forgetting things or was slow to react at work. Peggy, the forever nurse and protector, left the profession to not hurt anyone. She recognized the early signs of dementia. Her life was spent serving, comforting and helping others.

At that moment, she made the decision to keep her promise to the pledge of, 'first do no harm.'

Like any patient with dementia, there are good and

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE.... continued

not so good days. I can stay away from the 'bad days' comment due to my maturity in understanding of the disease. If I were six and with Grandma Blackman it may be a 'bad day' since my immature brain could not understand Grandma was not the person she



was. I can now have good and not so good days when visiting with Peggy. She will always be my 'little' sister, 12-years my senior. I recognize that sometimes her behavior is not her; it is a transformation of what the disease is doing to her brain. I miss the Peggy of yesterday.

But I am grateful I still have a Peggy today.

I wish each and every one of you did not have to traverse the dementia journey of a loved one. Odds are many of you have and/or continue to do so. My heartfelt love and support are with you! May you find yourself loving the person you know and not reacting to the one who may be a stranger in front of you. I wish I had known and loved my Grandma Blackman the way I do my sister Peggy.

May the new year continue to bring you joyous memories to never forget!

Rob

## Member Contribution

### Tutoring

Contributed By COPRA member Kim Dorney

Finding purpose and a way to contribute to the community gnawed at me after a meaningful almost 30-year career at the COP and six more years at Gateway Airport. Finally, my COP water bill brought me my answer! I signed up to be a reading tutor through the City's Youth and Education Office/AARP program (YEO/AARP).

I love reading and I really appreciate the opportunity to share that with some second and third graders who are behind. And I've learned so much too. For example, students learn to read by 3rd grade, and read to learn beginning in 4th. In Phoenix, only 1 in 3 students meets standards by the end of 3rd grade, and it's only slightly better statewide. At the end of the school year, we see the test results and progress our own students have made. Now that is rewarding!

The YEO AARP Experience Corp (ugh! code for old people!) program manages a well-researched and proven program to make a difference. The tutor training and support is excellent. The program is clear and the students enjoy it.

It's great seeing student progress and also making connections with the students in the 1-1 tutoring. They are excited about their own progress and the positive feedback we give them.

Each student brings their own interests (trucks, slugs, soccer, dinosaurs....and I had never heard of Dog-Man

before!) as well as their sense of humor and sometimes drama.

I began tutoring during Covid when students were at home on their tablets. I saw one little boy's feet more than his face then! But somehow, he still made reading improvements.

Another in-class student was so quiet and muffled that I occasionally broke out my Big Mouth Frog voice where I would E-NUN-CI-ATE each syllable to encourage him to speak more clearly and to laugh!

So, I write all this to share a bit of my retirement story AND to encourage you to consider being a tutor. Tutoring hours are twice a week for two hours each session which allows for tutoring four students each time. And the schedule is generally late September to mid-May. So, if this is something you want to learn more about, contact Briselda Rodriguez-Huff (briselda.rodriquez@phoenix.gov), tutor program manager, and check out the webpage at <https://www.phoenix.gov/administration/departments/education/get-involved/read-on/aarpfoundation-experience-corp.html>. Maybe I'll see you there!

All the best,

Kim



## Possibilities and Risks of AI (Artificial Intelligence Tools)

AI can help people choose how to live as they age, but scammers have embraced it, too. The challenge? Understanding the problems from the positives.

### AI Risks

We are being inundated with FAKE AI and too much to be debunked quickly and now has a name AI SLOP!

Some of AI Slop can be bizarre and fun the risks are those that are misleading and so many are targeted at the elderly. They are designed to tug at your heartstrings, which is the point. Every click and every share helps AI slop spread faster and farther.

This is just another tool for scammers.



Trust your gut and you can verify contact at [verify.contentauthenticity.org](https://verify.contentauthenticity.org). Also don't interact with the content and never ever initiate a financial transaction.

The Possibilities of AI are growing and below are a couple examples.

AI Tools: Navigating Systems with AI tools that streamline customer service tasks, such as getting advice to drafting a letter.

Here are few AI tools available: ChatGPT: Google Gemini, Microsoft Copilot which used to be Bing; and for you Apple users Apple Intelligence.

These chatbots and services churn out texts, audio, pictures and videos in seconds, based on voice prompts from a user. Content is drawn from the ginormous databases these AIs were trained on — the internet at large or a smaller data set — what tech geeks call large language models or LLMs.

### Get some advice

Start with the basics. Some Examples: "Is a nursing home appropriate for my aging mother who has dementia and issues with mobility?" A follow-up question could be "How much is this going to cost?"

### Draft a letter

Having trouble crafting that email to a company's customer service center?

Maybe you're seeking compensation for lost luggage, asking an insurance company to reconsider your denied claim. But you don't know how to write it to get results.

Ask AI to get you started with a prompt such as, "Draft a letter to ..." and then add the details.

### Avoid the pitfalls

Like anything, avoid the pitfalls and trust your gut.

Don't take what AI spits out as gospel. Content may be biased and sometimes inaccurate, so verify anything that looks like a "fact."

Be especially wary of leaning on AI for financial, legal and medical advice. AI can provide initial direction, but you should also seek the advice of qualified professionals for important matters.

And be careful not to give the bot any financial or revealing personal data. Finally, remember that AI is just a tool, not a solution in itself.

"There's a thought that AI's going to do everything for us in the future, "Maybe sometime in the future, but certainly not today."

If curious about AI consider take a class like "Intro to Chatting with AI" which is available for free if you are a member of AARP.

Use AI to ask the question: "Free AI classes for seniors"

## Member Contribution

### Snippets From the Past

Contributed by COPRA Member Jacque Hoffman

**THE NEXT DOOR NEIGHBOR:** I was a latchkey kid. My mother worked as secretary, so sometimes, if she could, she would arrange for me to stay with neighbors for the few hours after school until she got home from work. Our next door neighbor was an elderly Yugoslavian woman who took care of the house for her middle aged son. She didn't speak any English and we could not talk to each other. I would come into her perfectly neat home and sit at the table with my school books. She would save coffee from breakfast and heat it on the stove with thick cream and sugar and give it to me to sip while I worked on my homework, maybe not the best beverage for an 8 year old, but I thought it was delicious. She would sit across from me and stare with a slight smile creasing her worn face, the only sound in the house was a mantel clock ticking away in the living room. I know now that she must have been lonely and looked forward to our daily visits.

I am glad we had the chance to create this memory together.



**UPPER, MICHIGAN'S BETTER HALF:** I was waiting in a car for a friend outside a small store in northern Michigan and I saw a group of teenagers riding horses through a field.

They approached a copse of trees growing around a small creek. Although the horses had been walking along easily, all of a sudden, they started turning in circles and would not approach the trees. Try as they might to gain control of the horses, the teens had to give up and go back the way they had come. I watched in fascination and



a few minutes later a very large mountain lion came out of the undergrowth near the creek and loped across the road in front of my car to disappear into a wooded area behind the store. The teens had no idea how close they came to danger, but the horses did.

**OUT OF TOWN GUESTS:** We live about a 3-hour drive from the Grand Canyon. Family and friends always want to include seeing this wonder of nature when they visit. With my niece and family, we took in the sites of Sedona and Flagstaff, then stayed overnight so we could get up early the next day to see the canyon. In the morning, we were dismayed to find out the entire canyon was enveloped in heavy fog! We could barely see our feet! But we soon realized this was a rare experience as we walked around the park shrouded in mist. Slowly the fog lifted and by mid-afternoon we could see the majestic views we were there to experience and created a memory we won't forget.



By Louis Matamoros

Welcome to SITREP, which stands for situation report. This section of you Chronicle covers various military topics every month. If you have any specific questions or issues you'd like to be explored, please send an email to: [copratreasurer@yahoo.com](mailto:copratreasurer@yahoo.com).

**Fort Jackson** smelled like hot asphalt, pine trees, and fear. The bus doors hissed open, and before my boots touched the ground, the screaming started.

"GET OFF MY BUS! MOVE! MOVE! MOVE!"

A drill sergeant stormed up the steps, his campaign hat cutting a sharp shadow over his eyes. "You think this is summer camp? THIS IS FORT JACKSON, AND I OWN YOU NOW!"

I tripped off the bus, duffel bag slamming into my hip, heart hammering. We sprinted to the yellow footprints like our lives depended on it.

"YOU—YES, YOU—WHY ARE YOU BREATHING LIKE THAT?"

"Drill Sergeant, this trainee is—"

"I DIDN'T ASK FOR A LIFE STORY! STAND STILL!"

From that moment on, time stopped belonging to me. Each day melted into the next, and a new routine took over my life. Every day started the same. Lights on at zero-dark-thirty. "GET UP! YOU'VE GOT FIFTEEN SECONDS TO BE A SOLDIER!"

We hit the ground running—push-ups in the bay, slammed the pavement in unison as we moved across Fort Jackson, cadence echoing through the trees. "IF I HEAR ONE MORE OUT-OF-STEP BOOT, WE'RE STARTING OVER!" "Yes, Drill Sergeant!" Arms burned. Shoulders locked. We learned to move as one body or suffer as individuals.

After weeks of drilling the basics, we finally faced the rifle range. The drill sergeant's voice dropped, deadly calm. flutter kicks in the hallway, sweat pooling on the floor.

"YOU'RE SHAKING? GOOD. THAT MEANS IT'S WORKING." I adjusted. I qualified.

Weeks blurred together—PT until legs shook, obstacle courses that shredded hands, ruck marches that felt endless. But nothing prepared us for the final test.

Then, just when routine felt almost bearable, came the challenge everyone feared most: the 25-mile road march. Before sunrise, packs were tightened, boots laced, faces set.

"THIS IS WHERE YOU QUIT—OR YOU PROVE YOU BELONG," the drill sergeant growled. Mile five burned. Mile ten screamed. By mile fifteen, my shoulders felt like they were tearing apart.

"KEEP MOVING!"

"DON'T LOOK DOWN!"

"YOU FALL OUT, YOU QUIT!"

My feet went numb. My mind tried to bargain. One step became the only thing that mattered. Then another. Then another. At mile twenty, someone stumbled. Without thinking, we locked arms and dragged him forward. The drill sergeant watched us pass.

"ABOUT DAMN TIME YOU LEARNED YOU'RE A TEAM." When we crossed the finish line at mile twenty-five, I didn't cheer. I just stood there, swaying, knowing something inside me had changed forever.

After all that, graduation morning arrived, and everything felt strangely quiet. We stood in formation, uniforms crisp, boots polished. Families filled the stands. The same drill sergeant who once screamed inches from my face walked in front of us.

His voice was steady now. "LOOK AT YOU. DAY ONE, YOU COULDN'T STAND STILL.

NOW YOU'RE SOLDIERS." He paused.

"I TRAINED YOU. YOU EARNED THIS."

As the band played and we marched across the field, pride hit harder than any road march ever could. When they called us soldiers, it wasn't just a word anymore.

It was something we survived.

It was something we earned.



## COPERS NOVEMBER 2025 RETIREES

Cory D. Matt	
David E. Adams	Parks and Recreation Department
Denise Doran	
James P. Decker	Parks and Recreation Department
James C. Taschner	Public Transit Department
Jason R. Martin	Phoenix Police Department
Jeffrey J. Barton	City Manager's Office
Jose A. Habre	Parks and Recreation Department
Kevin D. Cullens	
Michael S. Ramirez	Planning and Development Department
Olivia Anderson	Parks and Recreation Department
Patricia L. Kirland	Human Services Department
Patricia A. Lucero	Municipal Court
Patricia A. Maus	Phoenix Police Department
Robert Nandin	Water Services Department
Roberta Gonzales	Neighborhood Services Department
Stephen G. Bunyard	Planning and Development Department
William C. Walsh III	Parks and Recreation Department

## NEW MEMBERS

<b>Inger Erickson</b>	<b>City Manager's Office</b>
<b>Darlene Helm</b>	<b>Water Services Department</b>
<b>Sandra Hunter</b>	<b>Law Department</b>

## IN REMEMBRANCE

Michael Thompson	10/01/2025	Water Services Department
Celia Acuna (Jimmy)	11/12/2025	
Charles Hill	11/13/2025	City Manager's Office
Georgye W. Neideffer	11/13/2025	Finance Department
Anna M. Kosturik	11/15/2025	Street Transportation Dept.
Catherine St Andre (Kenneth)	11/18/2025	
Leslie G. Ybarra	11/21/2025	Public Works Department
Tommy Davis	11/22/2025	Public Works Department
Linda Robbins	11/24/2025	Water Services Department
Placido Carrillo	11/27/2025	Aviation Department
Judith Crary	11/28/2025	Municipal Court
Larry Elliott	11/29/2025	Aviation Department
Jane Fricke	11/29/2025	Phoenix Police Department

(Those on the list who are surviving spouses will have the retiree's name in parentheses after the deceased's name.)

## 2025 COPRA Board

### Board of Directors:

#### President:

**Rob Sweeney** | 480-215-2215  
coprapresident@gmail.com

#### Vice President:

**Donna May** | 602-513-1069  
dmay.copra@gmail.com

#### Treasurer:

**Louis Matamoros** | 623-734-6624  
copratreasurer@yahoo.com

#### Secretary:

**VACANT**

### Board Members

#### Chronicle Committee:

**Regina Ficken** | 623-521-0052  
rfcoprachronicle@gmail.com

#### Retirement Board Committee:

**Rob Sweeney** | 480-215-2215  
coprapresident@gmail.com

#### Membership Committee:

**Anna Marie Dragonetti**  
602-992-0362  
copra.members@gmail.com

#### Programs Committee:

**Kathy Wenger** | 602-550-4390  
kjh7833@msn.com

#### Website and Social Media Taskforce:

**Gail Piceno** | 602-509-1908  
Gpiceno0808@gmail.com

#### Health Care Committee:

**Ron Ramirez** | 623-640-3934  
Jman2345@cox.net

#### Board Member:

**Colleen Ostrander** | 602-909-6011  
cmaeb1959@gmail.com

#### Other Communications Support:

**VACANT**

**COPRA website:** [www.phoenixcopra.com](http://www.phoenixcopra.com)

**City Retirement Systems (COPERS):**  
602-534-4400 | [www.phoenix.gov/copers](http://www.phoenix.gov/copers)

**COPMEA:** 602-262-6858 | [copmea.com](http://copmea.com)

**COP Human Resources – Benefits**  
602-262-4777

# JANUARY COPRA CHRONICLE

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Please send address corrections to:  
COPRA CHRONICLE  
PO Box 2464  
Litchfield Park, AZ 85340

## COPRA Monthly winner

By receiving the COPRA Chronicle via email significantly defrays the printing and postage costs for your COPRA. An added benefit is that if there is any important information that COPRA wants to send you, we have your email address on file and can transmit the news to you in a timely fashion.

In order to encourage our COPRA members to receive the Chronicle via email, each month, we will randomly select one member who receives their Chronicle by email and that member will receive a \$25 gift certificate to a grocery store (Fry's or Safeway).

### The December winner is John Parks II!

CONGRATULATIONS, John!



*If we already have your email address, you are automatically entered!*

### If you do not receive the Chronicle by email, start NOW!

Request the change from paper copy to email version by providing your email address to Anna Dragonetti at [copra.members@gmail.com](mailto:copra.members@gmail.com)

She can also be reached by phone at 602-992-0362.

## Chronicle Articles Deadline

This is YOUR newsletter, and we want to hear from you!

- ★ *How did you start your career with The City of Phoenix?*
- ★ *Tell us about yourself, good memories from work, a trip you've taken or an interesting hobby you have.*
- ★ *Suggest or request a subject that might be of your interest and your fellow retirees.*

**Submission Deadline: 15th day of the month before you want the article to appear.**

Any member may submit material for publication, the Chronicle Chair and the Editor will determine what will appear in the issue of the month based on suitability and available space.

**Submissions:** [coprachronicle@gmail.com](mailto:coprachronicle@gmail.com)

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