

Fall 2021
Through the

LOCAL 26 IBEW-NECA JOINT TRUST FUNDS

WIRE

Are You Ready to Retire?



ALSO INSIDE: Protecting Your Financial Identity p.14

Dear Participant,

Ask any retiree if they are happy in retirement and I am sure their answer will be a resounding, yes! If you ask our retirees what makes them so happy in retirement they will probably say the peace of mind they have with their Local 26 pension and IA plan, their health care coverage, and the friendships they have from their days in the trade. However, none of these things came easy; each one required work to come to fruition. That's right, planning a happy retirement takes work.

You may know that you want to retire at a certain age but making sure your retirement will be all that you hope it will be when you get to that age takes planning...and work. This issue of *Through the Wire* is dedicated to helping you plan out the retirement you deserve. It's just not that easy to retire on a moment's notice and we are here to make sure your transition to retirement is smooth, stress free and realistic. (Don't underestimate the power of your emotions the day you hang up your toolbelt after decades on the job!)

To those who are already retired, congratulations. To those who are looking towards retirement, I encourage you to learn now what it takes to retire so you will be able to do so when and how you want. And to all, the EWTF is here with you every step along the way!

In good health,



Mike McCarron
Fund Administrator

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Through the Wire is a publication of the
Local 26 IBEW-NECA Joint Trust Funds
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www.go-creative.net
Printing: Kelly Press, Inc.

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Local 26 IBEW NECA Joint Trust Funds



Transition Seamlessly from Deadlines to Life on Your Own Time

Get your applications in well before you retire so you don't delay a minute of your hard-earned retirement.

As a long-time Local 26 electrical worker, you have been able to build a comfortable life for yourself and your family, complete with excellent wages and top notch benefits and even the ability to put some money away in retirement and savings. Now that you are mere inches away from retirement, it's time to make sure that all of your planning and hard work get put into action to give you the retirement you deserve.

Making the decision to retire is certainly the first step but it's definitely not the only thing you need to do before hanging up the tool-belt. You need to make sure that your retirement income is ready to be accessed—your pensions, your Individual Account Plan, and Social Security—and you need to

have your retiree health care coverage activated. After all, you want to seamlessly transition into retired life, right?

A good place to learn more about what you need to do to prepare for retirement is the Local 26 Pension Seminar which is now held twice a year, in April and in October. Representatives from the EWTF share a wealth of information on the retirement process, specifically the Local 26 Pension, along with representatives from Fidelity who speak about the Individual Account Plan and presenters from the Social Security Administration, CVS Caremark and the Local 26 Credit Union. These seminars are very well attended and reservations are required in order to ensure everyone can be accommodated. The

seminar is typically announced in the *InCharge* magazine and on the Local 26 website.

If you missed the last seminar or are unable to attend the next one, read on!

There are multiple things to think about when planning for your retirement—your International, Local 26 and National Electrical Benefit Fund (NEBF) Pensions; Individual Account Plan; Social Security; Medicare and your retiree health care coverage. Each one of these things requires time to process paperwork for enrollment so do not leave the necessary paperwork until the last minute. In fact, both the International and National Electrical Benefits Fund (NEBF) Pensions require six months to process enrollment paperwork and ▶

the Local 26 Pension requires three months for processing enrollment paperwork. Each of these pensions requires a different application. The Local 26 pension application form can be obtained from the Trust Fund office, which only oversees Local 26 specific benefits, such as the Local 26 pension and the health plan. However, an application for the International Pension can be obtained through the Local 26 finance office or at www.ibew.org and an application for the NEBF Pension can be obtained through the NEBF website at www.nebf.com.

The Local 26 Pension

The Local 26 Pension is the pension overseen by the Local 26 IBEW-NECA Trust Funds. **You should apply for your Local 26 Pension 90 days before you intend to retire.**

In order to apply for your Local 26 Pension you will need to include copies of the following with your application:

- ▶ Your birth certificate or passport
- ▶ Beneficiary Designation Form
- ▶ Federal Tax Withholding Form (Form W4-P)

- ▶ Maryland Tax Withholding Form (if applicable)
- ▶ Rollover and Tax Withholding Form for One-Time Lump Sum Payment (if applicable)
- ▶ Application for Electrical Welfare Trust Fund Retiree Health Coverage (if applicable)

Additionally, depending on your marital status you will also need to submit copies of:

- ▶ Spouse's birth certificate or passport (if you are still married)
- ▶ Copy of marriage certificate (if you are still married)
- ▶ Entire copy of all signed divorce decrees, Qualified Domestic Relations Orders (QDROs), separation papers and death certificates (if you were previously married)

If you do not have a birth certificate or passport for proof of age, other acceptable forms of proof include baptismal certificate, registration of birth, naturalization papers, immigration papers, or a hospital birth record. If you do not have any of the above proofs of age, you can provide two secondary forms of proof which may be a signed statement by the physician or midwife in attendance at birth, a U.S. Census record, a certified school record, military discharge papers, certified vaccination records, a signed application for a life insurance policy and a copy of the policy bearing your age or date of birth, marriage record showing date of birth or age or certified application for marriage, or a child's birth certificate showing your age at the time of their birth.

The standard pension benefit for a married participant is a Joint and Survivor Pension, which continues payment to your spouse after your passing, however, this payment option can be changed if you and your spouse both agree, in writing, to a different form of payment. The other payment option, typically opted by those who are not married, would be a Lifetime Pension with 60 Month Guarantee. If you are married and do not want the Joint and Survivor Pension option, this decision must be made within the 90 days before you plan to retire, and once pension payments begin, the payout option cannot be changed.

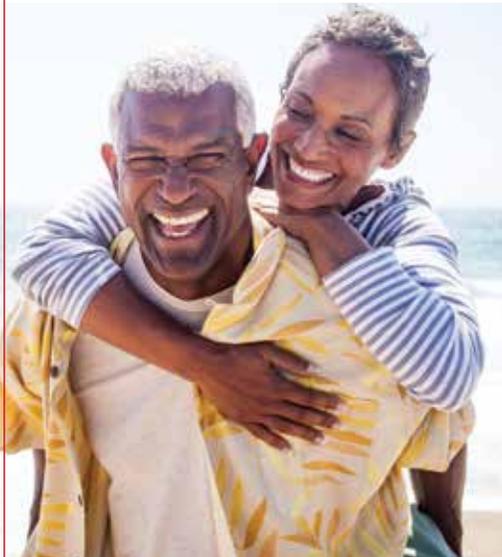
IBEW International Pension and the NEBF Pension

The Trust Funds Office does not have any authority over the IBEW International Pension or the NEBF Pension. However, applications can be found online at www.ibew.org and www.nebf.com, respectively.

These pensions are important to your financial security in retirement so it is critical that you **contact the Local 26 finance office at least six months prior to your intended retirement date** to ensure that you have everything in order to begin receiving payments from these pension plans upon your retirement. They may require different documentation than the Local 26 Pension and you may need to make payment decisions that also differ from the Local 26 Pension.

Medicare

Medicare will be your primary health care coverage in retirement.



If you are already receiving Social Security benefits or benefits from the Railroad Retirement Board before turning 65, you should automatically be enrolled in Medicare once you turn 65. In fact, you should receive your Medicare card in the mail about three months before your 65th birthday.

If you have not been receiving benefits from Social Security you will need to enroll around your 65th birthday. Enrollment in Medicare Part A (hospital) can take place at any time, beginning as early as three months before your 65th birthday, but Medicare Part B (medical) must occur during certain enrollment periods. You can get a Medicare application by contacting the Social Security Administration or the Railroad Retirement Board if you or your spouse ever worked for the railroad.

There are three times in which you can enroll in Medicare Part B but you could face a penalty if you do not enroll when you are required to. The enrollment periods are the Initial Enrollment Period, the Special Enrollment Period, and the General Enrollment Period.

The Initial Enrollment Period, which applies to retirees, is seven months long and begins three months before your 65th birthday, extending through your birthday month, and into the three months after your birthday. Of course, applying early will eliminate the risk of a delay in the start of your Part B coverage.

The Special Enrollment Period for Medicare Part B applies to those who continue working beyond age



65, and lasts eight months after the day you retire (or the day your spouse retires if you are covered by a plan from your spouse's place of employment) or the day your coverage under your group health plan ends, whichever comes first. If you are still working at age 65, you should still enroll in Part A because should you require hospitalization and the EWTF does not cover the full amount, Medicare Part A may cover some or all of the remaining balance.

The last enrollment period, the General Enrollment Period, is for all late enrollees who did not enroll in the Initial Enrollment Period or the Special Enrollment Period. The General Enrollment Period takes place during January, February, and March each year, with Part B coverage beginning July 1 of that same year. However, the General Enrollment Period comes with a penalty for those who did not previously enroll in Part B when they were eligible. That penalty

is a 10% surcharge to your premium for every 12-month period late in enrolling. For example, if you were eligible to enroll in Part B at age 65 but you waited until age 70, you will be assessed a 50% surcharge (10% x 5 years delay) to your monthly premium. The only exception to this penalty would be if you were still covered in a group health plan from the time you were eligible for Part B until you actually enrolled.

Local 26 Electrical Workers Trust Fund—EWTF (Health Plan)

In order to receive retiree health care coverage under the EWTF, you must have ten consecutive years of coverage preceding your retirement date and be receiving a pension from the Local 26 Pension Plan or receiving Social Security benefits.

Retirees use our EWTF as supplemental coverage to Medicare.

Retirees who still participate in the EWTF are required to pay for their ▶



own premium which is based on age. It is important to fully understand the out-of-pocket expense for retiree coverage with the EWTF in order to factor this expense into your retirement budget. Those who are not yet eligible for Medicare and are age 59 or younger, will pay \$200.29 per month, per eligible dependent, with a family maximum of \$400.58 per month. Those not yet eligible for Medicare who are age 60-64 will pay \$145.16 per month per eligible dependent. Once you or your covered dependent are eligible for Medicare, the EWTF premium lowers to \$73.50 per month to keep the EWTF as supplemental coverage.

Many retirees opt to have the cost for their EWTF premium deducted from their monthly Local 26 Pension payment so as to never miss a EWTF payment.

It is important that you notify the Fund Office when you and/or your spouse become eligible for Medicare otherwise you will be billed for charges that the EWTF pays on your behalf that should have been covered by Medicare. A copy of your Medicare card should be sent to the Fund Office so your health care charges can be first

paid by Medicare with the EWTF acting as supplemental coverage.

Local 26 Individual Account Plan (annuity)

Your application to draw upon your annuity should be **submitted to the Fund Office no less than 30 days before you intend to retire but can be submitted up to 180 days before your retirement.** An application for retirement distribution can be obtained through the Fund Office and you should refer to the balance from your last quarterly Fidelity Investments statement to estimate your benefit. If you do not have your last statement you can call Fidelity at 866-848-6466 or go into your account online at **www.netbenefits.fidelity.com**.

Like the Local 26 Pension, the standard form of payment for the annuity is the 50% Joint and Survivor annuity, if you are married. However, you may elect to change that form of payment to be a lump sum payment, equal monthly installments for up to 120 months, a combination of both lump sum and equal monthly installments or a 75% Joint and Survivor annuity. Lump sum payments can be rolled over into an Individual Retirement

Account (IRA) and a check will be mailed to you made out to the financial institution handling your IRA. If you elect to change your form of payment from a 50% Joint and Survivor annuity, both you and your spouse need to submit that request in writing to the Fund Office. However, once payment is made based on a 50% or 75% Joint and Survivor annuity, that form of payment cannot be changed.

The standard form of payment for individuals who are not married is a life annuity that will provide benefits for your lifetime and will cease payment upon your death. Those who wish can take this accumulated share and use it to purchase a different type of annuity from an insurance company, but the Fund Office will no longer be responsible for providing customer service to you regarding your annuity. If you wish to reject the life annuity option, you must notify the Fund Office within the 180 days preceding your retirement date.

Participants who have less than \$5000 in their Individual Account Plan will receive their payment in one lump sum.

According to the provisions of the plan, distributions from the Individual Account Plan must take place no later than the April 1st following the year in which you



turn 72 years old or the April 1st following the year in which you leave covered employment. However, you may receive your annuity benefits as early as age 50 if you have permanently left covered employment.

Social Security

While once the gold standard for retirement savings, Social Security is often now too little for most retirees to live on. Fortunately for our Local 26 retirees and their spouses, Social Security is an extra cushion to their retirement income. Your Social Security benefit will be determined by the number of years you worked and your age at which you receive benefits. Full retirement age for Social Security is 66 for those born between 1943-1954 and 67 for those born between 1955-1960. Of course, the longer you delay retirement, the higher your monthly Social Security benefit will be.

You should plan to apply for Social Security about four months before you intend to retire. To see the current total of your Social Security benefits you can visit www.ssa.gov/myaccount to view or create your personal Social Security account. There is even a retirement estimator at www.ssa.gov/estimator.

You can apply for your Social Security benefits online at www.ssa.gov or by calling 800-772-1213. You will need the following original (not photocopied) documentation to apply:

- ▶ Social Security number
- ▶ Birth certificate
- ▶ W-2 forms or self-employment tax return from the last year

- ▶ Military discharge papers, if applicable
- ▶ Spouse's birth certificate and Social Security number if they're applying for benefits
- ▶ Proof of U.S. citizenship or lawful alien status if you (or a spouse) were not born in the U.S.
- ▶ Name of your financial institution, routing number and account number for direct deposit

Retirement is an exciting chapter in your life to look forward to. With your Local 26 Pension, Local 26 Individual Account Plan and EWTF retiree health coverage, coupled with the added cushion of Medi-

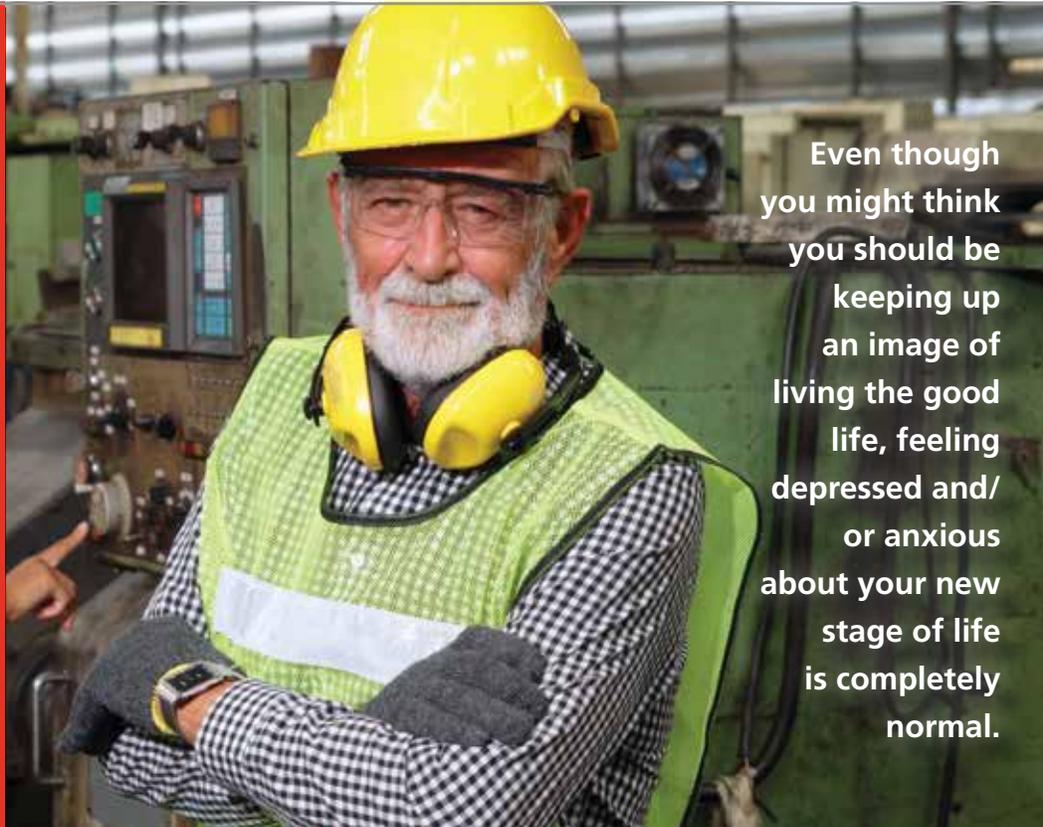
care, Social Security, the IBEW International Pension and the NEBF Pension, Local 26 members and their spouses can live with peace of mind in retirement. It is, however, each individual's responsibility to make sure their applications and documentation are submitted in a timely manner so their retirement can happen smoothly and seamlessly. Don't let a missed deadline keep you grounded from the vacation of your dreams or pursuing the hobby you have long awaited.

Of course, if you should have any questions about the steps you need to take before and even during retirement, the Fund Office staff is always available to help! Just give us a call at 301-731-1050. ●

It is always important to keep your beneficiary information up to date, and confirming it is accurate as you get your retirement paperwork in order is the perfect time. Remember, in the event of your passing, your pension and annuity benefits will be distributed to the person(s) listed as your beneficiary(ies) at the time of your death. There is absolutely nothing that can be done about changing beneficiary designations after your passing, even if the person(s) noted as your beneficiary(ies) is not current, or no longer part of your life. Remember, life changes such as marriage, divorce, birth of a child or death of a loved one can change who you wish your beneficiaries to be. You can confirm and/or update your beneficiary designation through the My Benefits Center member portal or by contacting the Fund Office. Take the few minutes...your loved ones will be glad you did!



Your Body is Ready to Retire But Is Your Mind?



Even though you might think you should be keeping up an image of living the good life, feeling depressed and/or anxious about your new stage of life is completely normal.

Thirty, forty, fifty years you have been working hard to build a secure retirement that will afford you peace of mind as well as the ability to experience new things such as travel and hobbies. You have had your eye on the prize of retirement—you, know six Saturdays and a Sunday—for as long as you can remember. And, now that you have reached retirement everything seems to be falling in place. You have a comfortable pension and annuity, you have achieved your professional goals, and your family is grown and out of the house. Check, check, and check. But, are you ready mentally to hang up the tools?

With so much focus on financially preparing for retirement, it's easy to overlook the impact that retirement can have on your mental health. For decades, a large part of your identity was tied to your

professional life. You identified yourself as an electrician, a teacher, an accountant, a nurse or whatever your line of work might have been but now that chapter of your life has closed. What's more, work might have also been a social outlet for you, generating many friendships and social connections. It can be difficult to navigate such a big life change over the long haul. You should mentally prepare for the emotional part of retirement so you can fully enjoy the fruits of your hard labor.

First and foremost, it's important to know that having the retirement blues is normal. In the first few weeks, maybe months, of retirement it can feel like a carefree vacation. You might get some traveling in, get together with some friends and family you haven't seen in a while, finish a

honey-do list, or perfect a hobby, but eventually the "sugar rush" of retirement will wear off and you might find yourself with a lot of, maybe too much, time on your hands. You may also start to worry about money with no paycheck coming in each week. Even though you might think you should be keeping up an image of living the good life, feeling depressed and/or anxious about your new stage of life is completely normal.

There are quite a few things you can do to stave off the retirement blues, some of which surprisingly mirror the things you did while still actively working.

Create structure to your day. When you were still working you set an alarm to wake up, showered, had breakfast, grabbed a lunch and headed out for the day to work. You are accustomed to a schedule to give your day purpose

and that need doesn't change in retirement. The good news is that in retirement you don't need to create structure that centers on your work. Create a schedule that includes waking at a normal time; exercising; social activities, like meeting a friend for coffee; volunteering, perhaps; and family meals with your spouse. Creating structure helps you continue to feel that normal daily routine that you thrived on before retirement and prevents the days from blending into each other in a blur.

Set goals to give your retirement days purpose. No, you don't have to set huge goals such as meeting deadlines like you did when you were working but small goals can help you shape your retirement and achieve the goals you've had for yourself. Maybe you want to travel as much as possible or complete a home renovation project. Whatever your goals may be, writing them down will help you stay focused on them and give purpose to all the newfound time you have on your hands.

Stay connected to friends. Whether you realize it or not, work was actually more than just work;

it was daily interactions with others and making social connections. Retirement removes those daily interactions unless you actively schedule social activities into your week. Maybe ask a friend to go for a walk one day a week and ask another to meet you for lunch, or get involved in a retirees' club through your union, a local community center or your house of worship. Forge friendships with other couples to make these social activities something you also engage in with your spouse. You might also seek out continuing education courses or programs that offer a reason to get out and socially engage with others.

Volunteering is a great way to give your retirement days purpose and engage with others. There are so many organizations desperate for volunteers from the local library to Habitat for Humanity, which would love to have the volunteer hands of skilled construction workers. Even schools need volunteers to monitor the cafeteria and playgrounds.

If managing your retirement finances has you anxious, **you might consider a part-time job** in your retirement, also known

BHS, our Employee Assistance Program, can be an invaluable source of support if you are struggling emotionally or even financially with the transition into retirement. Licensed health professionals are available by phone 24 hours a day, seven days a week. All calls to BHS are completely confidential. Contact BHS by phone at 800-765-3277 or learn more about BHS online by visiting bhsonline.com.

as an "encore" job. Working at the range on a golf course or in a local boutique won't create a windfall of money but that extra little paycheck might take a little stress off of you financially and it might just make you feel better having a paycheck again. What's more, the social component, the schedule and the feeling of purpose that comes with an encore job can also provide immeasurable benefits.

Another important component to eliminating financial anxiety in retirement is to **create and stick to a reasonable budget**. Take a look at your needs in retirement as they have likely changed from your needs when you were in the working world. With more free time on your hands you may want to budget more for entertainment while on the other hand you may no longer need a budget for work clothes.

The most important thing to remember is that while retirement may bring with it more free time, it can also bring a full range of emotions, from joy, freedom and excitement to anxiety, depression, and even boredom at times. And, all of these emotions, even in the same day, are perfectly normal feelings to come with this new chapter in your life! ●

Stay connected to friends.



Get Your Mind in Shape to Give Yourself the Very Best Retirement



When you plan for your retirement your focus is usually on your savings. Will I have enough to retire? Will I have to cut back on some “extras” in order to live on a fixed income? Should I downsize my home or go from two cars to one?

But, your focus should be equally placed on your good health in retirement. What can I do to ensure I stay healthy for a very long time to enjoy my hard-earned retirement?

Among the top ten health concerns for older people is Alzheimer’s Disease, a degenerative disease that slowly robs the brain of its functions, beginning with memory, then progressing to language, mood and even bodily functions. It is the leading cause of dementia in older adults. The disease typically affects those age 65 and older and the greatest known risk factor for the disease is aging. Alzheimer’s has been especially frustrating for the medical community because, as of now, there are no medications or supplements to decrease a person’s risk of getting Alzheimer’s and there is no treatment to stop or reverse its progression. There are nearly 300 clinical trials currently underway to find a cure for Alzheimer’s.

Interestingly, research has shown that there are many things we can do on our own to strengthen the brain

and provide a better defense against Alzheimer’s. While finding a cure to Alzheimer’s seems to be moving slowly, new data on prevention is being discovered every day to help people keep a healthy brain.

Give these seven healthy habits a try to improve the health of your brain and increase your chances of closing the door on Alzheimer’s.

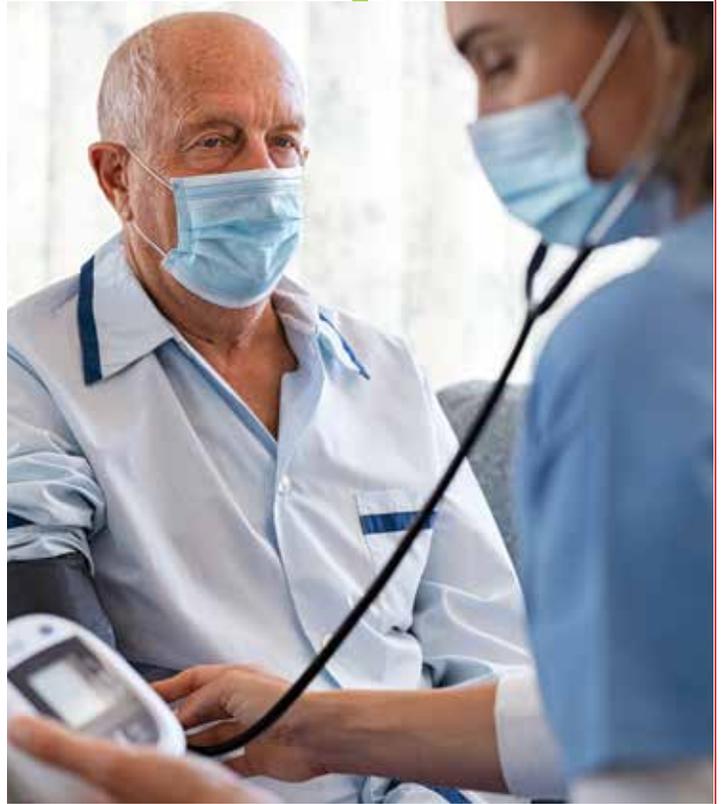
Keep your blood pressure under control. Heart health and brain health are interwoven by genetics, cholesterol, metabolism and the integrity of the cardiovascular system, which includes major blood vessels down to the smallest capillaries. Blood pressure can be maintained through diet, exercise and medication, if necessary.

Get regular exercise. Exercise not only increases blood flow to the brain, it generates the release of a protein called brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), which increases the growth of cells that send and receive signals from the brain. Studies have even found that exercise can increase the size of the hippocampus, the region of the brain that is destroyed by Alzheimer’s. It is recommended that older adults get at least two to five hours of exercise a week. And, participating in a group fitness class will make exercise a social experience as well!

Stick to a heart-healthy diet. Diets that control cholesterol and keep insulin activity normal have been found to reduce the risk for dementia. Research has shown that Mediterranean-style diets that focus on vegetables, fish, heart-healthy fats, nuts and berries have shown to increase brain volume and decrease beta amyloid, which is the protein that forms Alzheimer's trademark neuron-killing clumps in the brain.

Manage your weight. A study in 2020 found that male patients with obesity were 34 percent more likely to develop dementia than those who were normal weight and that risk increased to 39 percent for women who were obese. The link between obesity and Alzheimer's lies in insulin resistance. Excess body weight (as well as lack of exercise, smoking and poor sleep) prevents insulin from moving into cells leading to type-2 diabetes which has an increased risk for dementia.

Learn new things. Stimulating the brain exercises the brain in much the same way arm curls stimulate your biceps. The brain is a muscle and muscles thrive on being strengthened. Cognitive training that focuses on memory, speed and reasoning has been shown to have long-term positive results on things such as daily activities, independence, driving, and thinking skills. Such training can include crossword puzzles or other brain games like sudoku. Just make sure they are hard enough to challenge your brain but not so hard that you give up!



Get good sleep. Short sleep can damage the brain. Deep sleep allows the brain to produce less of the damaging proteins that cause Alzheimer's as well as allows these proteins to be purged as waste. Poor sleep has been shown to go hand-in-hand with obesity which is also a risk factor for Alzheimer's.

Manage stress. Not only can stress increase your blood sugar and lead to obesity, animal studies have proven that the stress hormone cortisol can decrease the size of the hippocampus and those findings have now been proven in older adults. It is believed that the risk for dementia increases by two percent for every stress symptom. Meditation is an easy way to reduce stress and can be done from almost anywhere, even using an app on your smartphone, computer or tablet. Meditation's ability to reduce depression is an added bonus!

It is one thing to be able to survive in retirement and quite another to live your best life in retirement. Being healthy gives you the very best shot at living a long and fulfilling retirement. While more is being learned each day about many chronic health conditions, and their potential treatment and prevention, we can all be doing our part to improve our own bodies and ultimately improve our chances for a quality retirement. ●



Meet Your Fund Office Staff

Q: What is your job at the Trust Fund Office?

A. I am here to help the members with any eligibility questions that they may have about their health care coverage. I am also known as the “COBRA QUEEN” as I help our members who are offered COBRA when they lose their coverage due to lack of hours or various other reasons. I also am responsible for processing any payments that come in for different services.

Q: What did you do before coming to the Fund Office?

A. Before coming to the EWTF, I was the supervisor of a union's international pension fund for over 20 years. I was responsible for reviewing and approving thousands of members' pension and annuity applications over those years, along with various other duties as assigned by the executive director.

Q: What are the biggest challenges to your job?

A. My biggest challenge is trying to help a member understand why

they do not have coverage and why they have lost it. Sometimes members don't understand how coverage is gained and why they may have lost it.

Q: What makes your job so rewarding?

A. Being able to help members when they are in dire straits and need to get their coverage back makes my job rewarding.

Q: What are some of the goals you have for your role at the Fund Office?

A. My primary goal is to make the members understand the eligibility rules for gaining coverage. My other goal is to create a new manual to help line out the steps of this job to get it ready for the next job candidate once I finally retire for good.

Q: How has the Fund Office changed since you started?

A. Over the last five years we have had some staff changes, and have had several changes to some welfare processes to help make the processes more efficient.

Q: What things have stayed the same?

A. The fact that a member can call the Fund Office and talk to a real person has remained the same. The eligibility rules have also stayed the same.

Q: What have been the greatest improvements to the funds over the years?

A. There have been significant changes with more technology/automation put into effect in the welfare/COBRA processes as well as the member portal. The members are soon going to be able to do most of whatever they need themselves by going through and signing up on the portal.

Q: What was it about the Fund Office that made you want to come work there?

A. My main reason was that this was another union that I could work for and hopefully bring some help to the department and the members who sometimes desperately need our help. Also, this job gave

me the opportunity to learn something that was different work from what I had been used to. Learning new jobs has been different and very good for me.

Q: What skills/qualities do you bring to the Fund Office?

A. I know how a union works and what the members want from their union trust fund office as well as the rules and regulations when it comes to all types of benefits.

Q: What do you think the members would be most surprised about regarding the Fund Office and/or the benefit funds?

A. Our employees here at the Fund Office genuinely want to help the members in all aspects. I think that the members truly do not understand how many benefits they have available to them.

Q: What is the biggest misconception about the Fund Office and/or the benefit funds?

A. I believe that most of our members do not

Carol Weller is an eligibility specialist in the accounting department. She has worked in the Funds Office for five years.



understand the correct eligibility rules regarding the hours needed to gain health and welfare benefits. The majority of the calls I receive are about this.

Q: What is the single most important thing the members should know about the funds?

A. When it comes to a member's eligibility for health and welfare, they need to maintain at least 135 hours in a work period in order to keep their benefits going. Any hours worked over 135 or under 135 go into the member's bank. A member can bank up to 810 hours (six months) to help maintain their eligibility. Also, they should know that there is always someone here at the Fund Office who can help them navigate through these processes.

Q: What has been the most difficult part of your job given the Covid-19 pandemic?

A. The difficult part of my job during Covid-19, was being home when the work I do really

requires me to be in the office. This was especially true with the COBRA processing. We all have managed, though. We all wanted to make sure that our members were taken care of.

Q: What has working in your role during a pandemic taught you about your job, your co-workers and/or office?

A. My job has taught me that I have a very important role in helping members when they need health eligibility. It has also taught me to be a little more patient with everyone. This pandemic has taught me that I have some of the best co-workers on earth! We all try to look out for one another here so that we can help the members and ourselves!

Q: What has the Covid-19 pandemic taught you about yourself? The members who depend on the Fund Office?

A. It has taught me that life is short and that a pandemic can affect anyone. It has taught me to be a little more

patient with myself and the members as our work is very valuable to our members and our members are most important.

Q: What do you think is the secret to the Fund Office working so successfully for the members?

A. The secret to our success is the comradery amongst most of our staff and their desire and compassion to help the membership. We also have team leaders and a fund manager who are willing to step up and do what is necessary to help our jobs run more smoothly.

Q: What are your passions/hobbies/interests outside of work?

A. I really enjoy going out to eat at all kinds of restaurants on the water or anywhere and just watching people. I also enjoy going to our family's beach house and just hanging with the family or reading a good book. Also, I am a very big Hallmark movie fan, especially the Christmas movies!!! I would love to get back to my crafts at some point.

Q: Can you offer a quote about your role in the office or about the Fund Office in general?

A. "We truly DO care about our members."

You Work Hard for Your Money; Now Protect It!

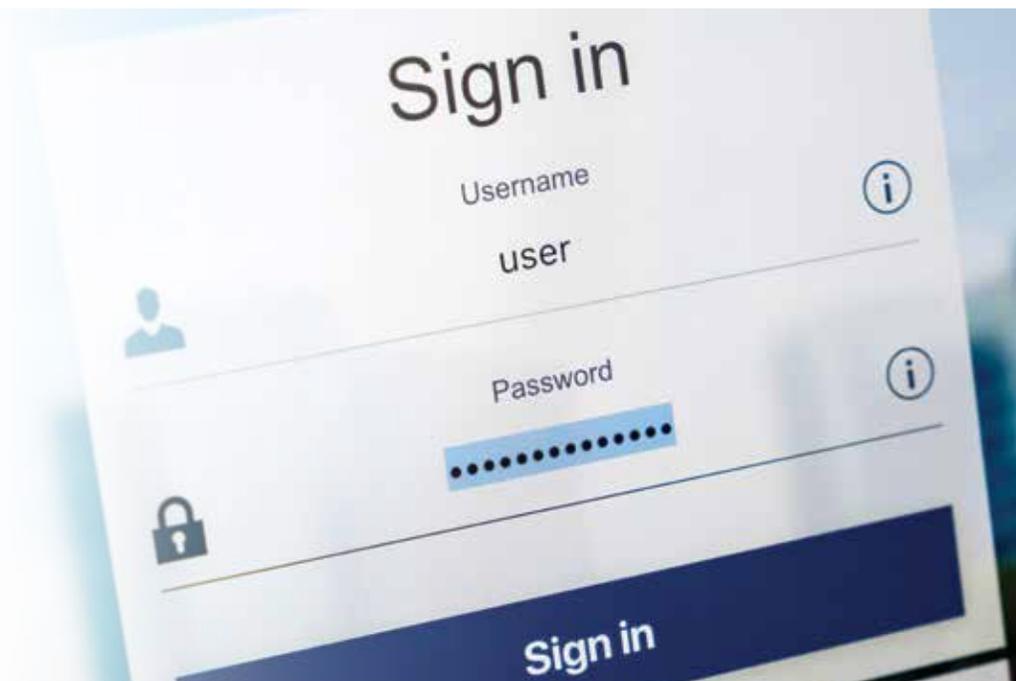
Without the mind of a criminal, it's hard to think about every way in which your personal information could be stolen. Most people are fairly trusting if their information is protected by a password. With all of the sophisticated ways in which information can be stolen and access to private accounts gained these days, a simple password is just not enough to keep you safe from fraud. It is more important now than ever that you protect your financial accounts, including your retirement accounts.

The Federal Trade Commission reports that in 2020 there were 2.1 million fraud reports by consumers. However, that does not account for all of the fraudulent activity that went unreported or undetected by consumers. Now, imagine fraud being committed against your hard-earned retirement savings, money that took you years or decades to accumulate.

The Employee Benefits Security Administration of the U.S. Department of Labor suggests everyone

take the following actions to protect their retirement accounts:

- ➔ When creating an online account, use strong and unique passwords. Don't use dictionary words and don't use letters or numbers in sequence, such as "abc" or "123." Be sure to use a combination of letters (upper and lower case), numbers and special characters, and try to make passwords at least 14 characters long. Change your passwords every 120 days or sooner if there is a breach. Don't share or reuse passwords and never write them down. A password manager program can help you create and track passwords.
- ➔ Register, set up and routinely monitor your online account. Online access helps you regularly check in and manage your investments, reducing the risk of fraudulent activity from taking place. If you don't register for online access for your accounts, cybercriminals might register for access and assume your online identity.
- ➔ If available, use multifactor authentication which requires a second credential to verify identity, such as a code sent via text message or email.
- ➔ Make sure your personal contact information is up to date so in the event of fraud or a breach, you can be contacted.
- ➔ Close or delete all unused accounts and sign up to receive



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account activity notifications. The more accounts you have open in your name the more vulnerable you are.

- ➔ Avoid using free WiFi, such as in hotels, airports, or coffee shops, as this type of connection makes you more vulnerable to criminals. Use your cellphone as a hotspot or your home network.
- ➔ Beware of attacks, known as phishing, that trick you into sharing your passwords, account numbers or other sensitive information to gain access to your accounts. A phishing message looks like it is coming from a trusted source but is actually a carefully crafted email that attempts to get you to share confidential information.
- ➔ Antivirus software can protect your computer and mobile devices from viruses and malware that can reveal personal information. Some common brands of antivirus software include Norton and McAfee but there are many others available.

If you suspect that you have been the victim of identity fraud or a cybersecurity attack, the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security have sites for reporting these crimes. Visit www.fbi.gov/file-repository/cyber-incident-reporting-untied-message-final.pdf/view or www.cisa.gov/reporting-cyber-incidents. ●

What is Phishing?

In general terms, phishing is when a cybercriminal sends what appears to be an official, legitimate message to a potential target seeking confidential information. The target often has no idea they have been duped because the message they are responding back to appears to be real and from a trusted source.

Phishing can happen via email with an email message that appears to be from a trusted company asking for personal information. Phishing via email can also come in the form of clone phishing where a previously delivered email that has a link or an attachment has its contents and recipients' addresses replicated to clone the exact email but with a virus or malware attached to the email instead of the original attachment or link. Phishing can also happen over the phone where an automated recording, which typically sounds synthesized, tells you that there has been fraudulent activity on your bank accounts or even in regards to the Social Security Administration and instructs you to call a phone number which will prompt you to enter confidential information to resolve the fraud. Phishing can even take place through text in the same manner it occurs via email, with a text message that might have a link to click, a number to call or an email address to contact that acts as bait.

While phishing attackers can be sophisticated there are some telltale red flags to look out for so

you don't fall victim to a phishing scam:

- ➔ Beware of a text message or email that you aren't expecting that comes from a person or source you don't know or use.
- ➔ Look for spelling errors and/or poor grammar in emails and texts and listen for poor grammar or odd word choice in phone calls.
- ➔ Keep an eye out for any emails, texts or calls that offer you something that is just too good to be true, expresses great urgency, or that's aggressive or scary.
- ➔ Do not trust any emails, texts or calls asking for an account number or personal information. Legitimate sources never ask for passwords, account numbers, personal information or answers to security questions in an email or text.
- ➔ Examine a website link to confirm that the link will actually take you to a legitimate website. Often phishing scams present what appears to be a legitimate link that actually directs you to a fraudulent destination. To confirm, you can hover your mouse over the link and your browser will display the actual destination without you clicking the link and taking the bait.
- ➔ If something makes you feel uneasy, chances are your instincts are right and you've been dealt a scam.



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IS RETIREMENT IN YOUR NEAR FUTURE?

The Local 26 Pension Seminar can help you get your retirement off the ground. Plan to attend the virtual seminar on Saturday, October 2nd. Registration will be available on the Local 26 website (ibewlocal26.org) beginning Friday, September 3rd. Registration is required.

Get your questions answered, get prepared and get excited to enjoy your well-deserved retirement.

