

MARCH 2024  
Through the **WIRE**  
LOCAL 26 IBEW-NECA JOINT TRUST FUNDS

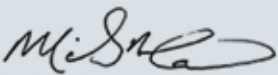
What's INSIDE

 From the Bullpen

You may be wondering what's going on with *Through the Wire*, the EWTF publication. This newsletter doesn't look anything like the magazine you've come to love. No, it doesn't; but it was time for us to take a look in the mirror at our body of work and make some healthy changes. We've smoothed out some wrinkles and breathed new life into our information delivery so that you, our participants, can live your best life.

You are looking at the new *Through the Wire*, and, you are going to see us more often than ever before—every month to be exact. We hope this new, monthly *Through the Wire* newsletter informs you and excites you about the benefits you have in the palm of your hand, and motivates you to put these benefits to work for you and your family. And, if our old magazine still has a place in your heart, don't worry because it has a place in ours, too, and we plan to also create some special-edition magazine-format *Through the Wire* publications during the year as the opportunities present.

We hope you enjoy the read and enjoy the ride!



Mike McCarron  
Fund Administrator



## Pitchers and Catchers Have Arrived to Spring Training; Are You Game-Ready?

A little sore during the seventh-inning stretch? Did you know that physical therapy and chiropractic care are covered by the EWTF?

Wondering if your bases are covered for you to retire soon? Our portal offers information on your pension and your retirement eligibility, as well as the forms you will need to make retirement official.

Want to be more of a manager than a spectator when it comes to your retirement? Our Individual Account Plan allows participants to take an active role in investment decisions if they want to or to just sit in the stands and watch their savings grow.

The Local 26 IBEW-NECA Joint Trust Funds has a game plan for your good health and good wealth!

## Don't Strike Out...REACH OUT

Depressed. Anxious. Those are big, heavy-hitting words.

But, even feeling sad, stressed, angry, or worried can mean that it's time for a mental health check for you or someone you love.

BHS is our employee assistance program (EAP), fully covered by the EWTF. Available to all participants and their dependents at no additional cost, licensed mental health professionals working for BHS are just a phone call away, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. All calls are completely confidential! No concern is too small, and before small things become too big, contact BHS to help restore balance and get you and/or your loved ones the help needed.

Call 800-327-2251



SCAN this QR code to access all of the valuable links mentioned in this issue of *Through the Wire*.



# Is Your Dinner Plate a Homerun?

March is National Nutrition Month which means it's time for a check on how you're treating your gut! Making the most of your dinner plate can happen with planning, shopping, cooking, and tracking—the four bases (or maybe it's basics!) of good nutrition.

## Plan

Plan your weekly meals ahead so you aren't grabbing just what's fastest but rather options that are both easy and healthy.



## Shopping

Shopping for nutritious foods to have at the ready will help you resist the temptation to run out for fast food. Creating a list will help you only buy what you need and avoid impulse purchases.

## Cooking

Cooking meals at home gives you control over what goes into your food, such as sugar, salt, and fat. BHS has some healthy and easy recipes online at <https://portal.bhsonline.com/health/recipes?q=>. Enter IBEW as the Organization ID.

## Tracking

Tracking serving size and calorie, fat, sugar, cholesterol and sodium intake is simple just by reading a nutrition label found on every packaged food item purchased in the grocery store and other retail outlets. Remember, nutrition label information is per serving, not per item!



## UPDATE FROM VIRTA: An EWTF MVP (Most Valuable Partner, that is!)

Is Virta a diabetes-management plan? Is Virta a weight-loss plan? Well, yes and yes. Virta has really evolved into a lifestyle plan to achieve better health through diabetes management and weight loss, with the goal of eliminating the need for prescription drugs such as insulin and the newly popular GL1 drugs like Ozempic, Munjaro, and Wegovy. Surely, you've seen their ads on TV.

Virta is an EWTF benefit available at no additional cost to all of our participants. The program relies on lifestyle and diet changes, not drugs, to help participants lose weight and control their diabetes, if they have it. Until recently, to participate with Virta, patients needed to have a body mass index (BMI) of at least 30, but Virta recently lowered its BMI threshold for participation in its program to 25, which will be inclusive of even more of our EWTF participants. BMI is a calculation of body fat based on height and weight. A BMI of 25.0 - 29.9 is high and falls in the overweight range, while a BMI of 30 or higher falls in the obese range.

If you are overweight and want to make a change, give Virta a try. You have nothing to lose....except unwanted pounds and reliance on prescription medications, of course!

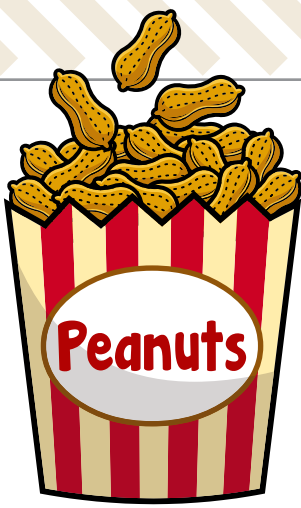
## PORTAL POV



Like our EWTF portal, Virta offers a private portal for members to enhance their experience with the program. Through the Virta portal, participants can connect with other participants for support and take part in online discussions. The portal also affords participants access to educational resources, meal plans, videos and more. Of course, you can also keep track of your own personal success on the portal as well. If you are a Virta participant, visit the portal for the full Virta experience.



**Virta offers diabetes and weight loss management at no additional cost.**



## Don't Strike Out at the Concession Stand



If taking in a ball game this spring is on your roster, don't lose count of your healthy eating plan and strike out at the concession stand. Stadium food is certainly not known for its low-calorie count and high nutrition. After all, where do you think Ball Park Franks got their name?

With a little lead-off planning, and resisting temptation of course, you can enjoy the game and still feel proud of yourself the next day (even if your fan-antics made it on the jumbotron!). Before heading to the game, look online to learn the concession stand options at your ballpark. Most venues offer at least a few healthier options. They just aren't always conveniently located, so you may have to walk around the concourse a bit.

Many parks now offer salads, vegan hotdogs and burgers, turkey burgers, grain bowls, even sushi. And, a few parks, Camden Yards in Baltimore and Nationals Park in D.C. among them, allow fans to bring in their own food.



*securing your retirement*

### YOUR PENSION PLAN

## What are Your Retirement Plans?

Yes, we know your plan is to retire when you are ready, but what kind of retirement *savings* plan do you have for retirement? Not all plans are the same. Your plan is likely very different from your neighbor's, from your cousin's, or from your accountant's.

Local 26 members have TWO retirement savings plans—a Pension Plan and an Individual Account Plan—that provide a secure retirement based on all of your years of hard work. Our Pension Plan is a **defined benefit plan** while the Individual Account Plan is a **defined contribution plan**. Having two plans, especially

a defined benefit pension plan, is extremely unique in the world of retirement plans, and makes our members very fortunate. Both types of plans offer advantages so having both plans for our members provides you with the most robust retirement savings possible. Our trustees created and oversee these plans to complement Social Security.

Defined benefit plans, in particular, have become increasingly rare these days because employers would rather individual investors bear the risks of growing their money rather than ensuring a specified amount to an individual's retirement 20, 30, 40, 50 years in the future. It takes a lot of careful planning to ensure that a defined benefit plan is funded and managed properly to provide promised benefits to retirees when they round home base into their retirement. So, go on and brag to your friends and family that you **know** you will be living well in retirement with your union retirement plans!



**There are some key differences between a defined benefit plan and a defined contribution plan.**

#### **Defined Benefit Plans:**

- Upon retirement, provide a guaranteed benefit each month or distribution as the plan is designed
- Enable recipients to know exactly how much they will receive in retirement
- Are overseen by a team of financial advisors and do not allow for participants to make investment decisions

#### **Defined Contribution Plans:**

- Are funded by a specific regular contribution but do not guarantee a specific benefit each month or distribution period upon retirement
- Pay a benefit that is based on the performance of the investment markets
- Allow participants to choose from a selection of investment funds in which to invest, or defer to a default fund carefully selected by an investment team

**YOUR INDIVIDUAL  
ACCOUNT PLAN**

*growing your assets*

# 5 Fun Facts: Fidelity

**1** Fidelity has been in business for over 75 years and has overseen our Individual Account Plan since it was created 42 years ago, in 1982. (That's a lot of candles on the birthday cake!)

**2** Fidelity has over 10,000 Local 26 Individual Account Plan participants under its care (Whoa, that's a lot of friends!)

**3** Fidelity manages \$12.6 trillion (yes, trillion!) on behalf of all of their investors.

**4** Fidelity has offices all across the U.S. for in-person advising, including 1 location in Washington, DC; 5 in Maryland, and 8 in Virginia; and locations around the globe including the U.K., Ireland, Central Europe, Asia and the Pacific Rim, India; and Bermuda. (So, even on vacation you can stop in and check on your annuity!)

**5** Fidelity welcomes its investors to be active participants in how their money is invested. The Fidelity website ([www.fidelity.com](http://www.fidelity.com)) lets you log in and check in on your annuity and search the Fidelity online library for investing information, among other things. Fidelity even has live customer support (yes, live!) by calling **800-835-5095**.



## Social Security

No, your eyes aren't deceiving you. Your Social Security Cost of Living (COLA) increase for 2024 was the smallest in three years at 3.2%. This is a big difference from 2023's COLA of 8.7%. At 2024's increase, the average Social Security recipient will only see, on average, an additional \$49 on their monthly check. COLAs are meant to help Social Security and Supplemental Security Income keep pace with inflation.

### KIDS' CORNER



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- WORD LIST:** ACTIVE      FRUIT      SLEEP  
 BALLPARK      GRAINS      SMILE  
 BASEBALL      HEARTBEAT      VEGETABLES  
 EXERCISE      PROTEIN      WATER