BELLTEL RETIREE

The Official Newsletter for Union and Management Retirees and Employees of Bell Atlantic, GTE, Idearc/SuperMedia/DexMedia, NYNEX, MCI, Verizon and its Subsidiaries. Paid for by contributions from Verizon and Idearc/SuperMedia/DexMedia retirees.

Fall 2020 — Volume 95

Member Survey: 90%-Plus Say Health Benefit Access Key. 15% Confirm Covid.

The world and our nation have simply not experienced anything like the COVID-19 pandemic in our lifetimes. Its impact is sweeping. Families have lost loved ones. Businesses have been forced to close and determine if it is possible to survive, and tens- of-millions of Americans are now out of work.

At the end of March your Association looked up and saw the emerging health and economic issues that were becoming so evident. What we saw could scare the heck out of anyone.

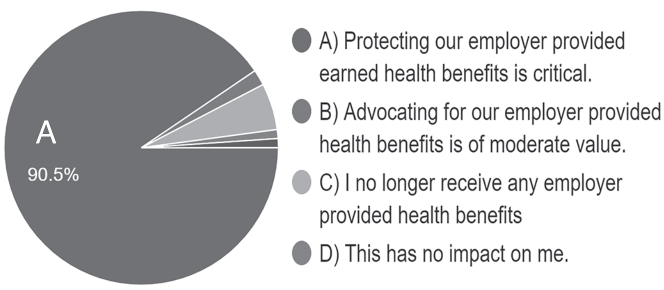
So, we felt it was critical to talk to you, our members, and ask your opinions. In late March and early April, we did -- and 2,710 of you answered -- expressing your vital feedback. We reported on that in the summer issue.

As the spread of this insidious virus continued through July and into August, we asked again, and 2,491 of you offered your opinions. This data is critical in helping shape our advocacy for you.

We asked how many of you, your family or friends have been diagnosed with COVID-19. In early April, just 78 of you, or 3.42%, responded yes. By the end of July, those yes responses grew to 365 or nearly 15% of you.

One member told us, "I was hospitalized with COVID-19 for five days in March. I am 82 years old and one of the fortunate elderly ones who walked out of the hospital alive. My wife tested positive but was not hospitalized."

How critical do you believe our mission is to protect your earned healthcare access?



Another who participated raised a very valid point, asking, "Due to poor testing (capabilities), how does one know if friends or family have COVID, unless they ultimately had a very bad case. Lots of people were sick in later winter and early spring. We will never know if they had it."

Even more of our members agreed with that position, with one adding, "My wife and I, and son living here have been told we likely had the COVID-19 even

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Pension Risk Transfer & Snoopy: What Retirees Need to Know

By Edward Stone

Pension de-risking or Pension Risk Transfer ("PRT") is a big business. From 2012 when we started monitoring PRT on behalf of the Association of BellTel Retirees until April of this year more than $157.5 billion has been transferred from old school Defined Benefit Plans to a variety of group annuity contracts issued by large insurance companies including Prudential, MetLife and Athene.

Athene is a newcomer to the insurance industry, and it is owned by and closely related to Leon Black's Apollo. Leon Black got his start in the insurance industry back in the early 1990's when he pocketed $3.5 billion in profit at the expense of the Executive Life policyholders.

Today, Apollo earns most of its asset management fees investing Athene's insurance assets.

This is a scary thought since Athene has complex and cozy relationships with a host of wholly owned captive reinsurance companies that repeatedly engage in financial alchemy to make it look like they are properly reserved, when they are not.

Literally billions of dollars in Athene's reinsurance arrangements are tied to wholly owned subsidiaries or captive reinsurance companies that hold opaque assets like Credit Linked Notes, Surplus Notes and Conditional Letters of Credit as "assets," when such instruments would never be approved by insurance regulators as admitted assets.

In other words, instead of real assets backing up all of its PRT deals, Athene depends in large part on related company IOU's that are often backed up by hollow assets or their own parent company guarantees!

Circular by design, so everything looks good on paper, but not what retirees need to feel comfortable about their retirement security.

Athene is not the only for-profit life insurance company that uses financial alchemy to reduce the amount of capital they hold in reserve.

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So Much for that Lockbox SSI & Medicare Running Dry

The financial turmoil created by COVID-19 has drastically accelerated the ticking time bomb of limited funding for key social programs for American retirees.

With 30 million fewer Americans working, the government has less in payroll taxes entering its coffers. Those are the taxes that directly fund Medicare and Social Security.

Even before the pandemic, payments from these programs exceeded the revenues coming in. Now, with revenue disappearing, the available reserves for some of these funds could evaporate entirely as soon as 2023!

According to a study published by the University of Pennsylvania, the Social Security trust fund, which was previously projected to disappear by 2036, now projects to become insolvent by 2032.

The Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget (CRFB), a bipartisan public policy organization, also reported that the Social Security Disability fund, which supports 8.5 million disabled retirees, could be financially ruined in the next ten years.

CRFB believes Social Security's decline could start to impact retirees as early as next year. According to its report, there might not be an annual cost of living adjustment in 2021.

In 2019, Medicare officials estimated that the Part A trust fund, which pays for inpatient care, would run out by 2026. Now, the CRFB says the trust could be exhausted by 2023 or 2024.

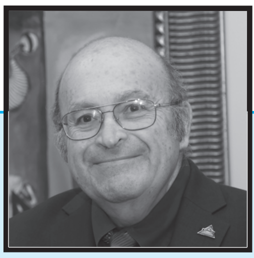
(Continued on page 5)

Annual Member Meeting Update

The annual member meeting which had been rescheduled to take place on October 14 on Long Island, NY must unfortunately be postponed again, due to COVID-19.

Please stay tuned to the website, social media, and email blasts for any new updates as they become available.

As Technology Evolves, So Does Your Association



Chairman's Report

By Jack Cohen

If you are reading this report, I suspect it would not be difficult for you to remember the image of the famous comic strip character Dick Tracy. I know I used to look forward to absorbing the adventures of that famous lawman with every new edition of the New York Daily News.

At the time, his radio wristwatch was something out of science fiction.

True, I do recollect having conversations with my buddy, whose apartment was across the courtyard from mine. Both of us used juice cans, connected by a common string. That was our walkie talkie. How many of you remember doing that? I'll bet it is a lot.

Since then, the enormous advances in communication technologies have been nothing short of a miracle. All of you reading these words have taken part in that miracle, nurturing it, and watching it grow. Can you imagine existing through this pandemic without some of those modern miracles?

Just think if we were living in 1918, instead of 2020. We, reportedly the most vulnerable population, would be experiencing an isolation about which we can only imagine with horror. Most of us now have a computer which enables banking, communications, shopping online, and an extraordinary capability to interact with friends and loved ones.

We use our computers to order groceries, clothing, and virtually anything, all deliverable to our homes. We can Zoom with children, grandchildren, and friends. Sure, hugs are out of the question, and we miss the personal contact. Surviving this pandemic remains the key goal. Horrible as it has been, we cannot deny the advantages we have over those who fought to survive during the 1918 flu pandemic.

Some technological advancements now considered essential were never on our minds prior to the current pandemic.

Many on our Board had to be dragged kicking and screaming into the Twenty-First Century, but now all of us embrace and appreciate the capabilities of social media and virtual meetings.

We have four board meetings each year, plus the Annual Member Meeting. Of course, having any large face-to-face meetings now is impossible for obvious health reasons. It is just not worth the risk to the health of any of our board or membership.

Our operations continue as usual and we have not missed a step. We are still deep into the health care and pension issues and continue to make progress with our shareholder proxy proposals.

In fact, just this year, one of our proxy proposals came close to gaining 43.5 percent of shareholder support, an increase over last year and a positive sign for its future potential success. We are deeply involved in the debate involving Medicare Advantage and we continue to actively pursue de-risking legislation.

We are using modern tools to fight today's battles – and tomorrows. We have conferences and board meetings through Zoom and have even had our first mini-meeting for Massachusetts members on Zoom. We will soon schedule additional Zoom mini-meetings to keep everyone connected.

Yes, your Association of BellTel Retirees is still here and we have not missed a step.

We hope and pray that you and your family are well and surviving this awful plague. We hope and pray that this nightmare will end soon and that, once again, we will be able to hug our children, grandchildren, and dear friends. We also hope and pray that you will not forget that we need you and your financial support to continue our efforts on your behalf.

Please be well and safe.

UNITED, TO PROTECT OUR FUTURE

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Healthcare Insurers Step Up Services

During the COVID-19 outbreak, health insurance companies serving the retiree community have begun offering additional benefits to support beneficiaries through the crisis.

UnitedHealthcare (UHC) has pledged $1.5 billion to support customers by waiving cost-sharing for specialists and appointments with primary care providers, with additional credits for premium payments and lower overall costs for customers under its UnitedHealthcare AARP Medical Supplements policy.

UHC has also pledged another $1 billion for rebates to policyholders.

The company will also waive cost-sharing for COVID-19 treatments and testing.

Members of Medicare Advantage, Medicaid, and other fully-insured individual and group programs will have their cost-sharing fees waived for telehealth appointments, even those unrelated to COVID-19.

These additional benefits were created after the $6.6 billion in profits that UHC earned in the second quarter of 2020. When hospitals and medical offices in many parts of the nation stopped taking walk-in patients, then cancelled appointments and postponed non-critical surgical procedures, large health insurers continued collecting their normal fees, but were paying out much less.

With many unknowns about the virus and patients and medical workers fearful of spreading COVID-19, drastically fewer people had doctor appointments and few claims needed to be paid. To counter this imbalance and preempt criticism of its enormous profits, UHC chose to offer additional support to its customers.

The insurer is not the only company that has provided new benefits to its customers during the pandemic.

Aetna offers similar perks, which will continue until September 30. Aetna customers, under an individual or Group Advantage Plan, do not have to pay out-of-pocket costs for in-network primary care telehealth appointments.

Further, Aetna is waiving all cost-sharing and co-pays for COVID-19 treatments.

Out-of-pocket costs for in-network primary care, for Medicare Advantage and other Aetna members have also been eliminated.

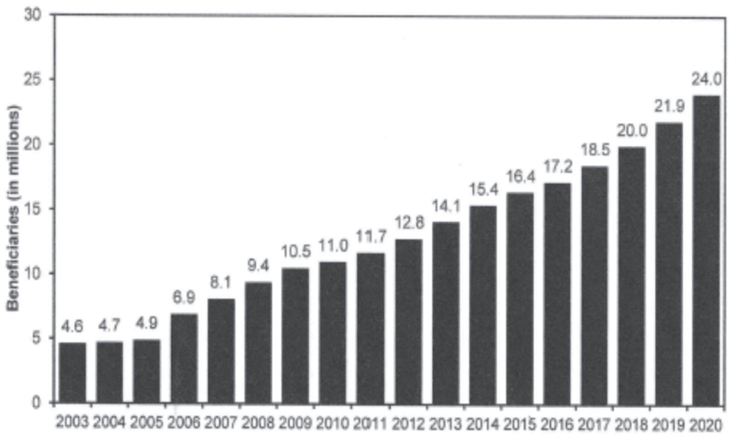
Medicare Advantage Plans – Why so Popular?

By Jack Cohen

More than one out of every three people enrolled in Medicare also has some sort of supplemental Medicare Advantage (MA) coverage. Today, more than 24 million older adults are covered by such plans (see graph). Why are Medicare Advantage plans so popular?

Verizon Medicare-eligible retirees are all on a Medicare Advantage plan, whether it is provided by UnitedHealth Care or Aetna, using a Medicare Advantage plan card. Most other retirees have traditional Medicare and use the traditional Medicare card.

Enrollment in Medicare Advantage, 2003-2020



Source: CMS Medicare managed care contract reports and monthly summary reports, February 2003–2020.

Traditional Medicare FFS (Fee-for-service) allows a health care provider to deal directly with Medicare, where the doctor provides services and submits claims. Medicare then pays the doctor directly without a "middleman."

With Medicare Advantage, your insurer acts as the "middleman," dealing directly with Medicare. Your healthcare provider thereby avoids cumbersome bureaucracy. UHC or Aetna submits the claim and pays the provider.

Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) pays the insurer upfront in excess of $14,000 per year for every covered beneficiary. Incentives such as Silver Sneakers and Amazon Gift Cards are offered to attract more beneficiaries.

The insurance carrier receives QBP (Quality Bonus Points) and additional money from Medicare for such offerings. One can easily see that MA insurance carriers make tons of money…as long as most beneficiaries stay healthy.

In Florida, the Villages Health provides services for more than 42,000 beneficiaries, including the retirement community known as The Villages.

Villages Health entered into an exclusive contract with UHC Medicare Advantage Plans in January 2017. Treating patients with The Villages Medicare Advantage plans generates more revenue than treating those with Original Medicare and supplemental policies. The Villages Health is paid for the number of Medicare Advantage patients it serves whether they see a doctor or not. Original Medicare pays the health system on a fee-for-service basis, often below the cost of providing those services.

There are issues related to how Medicare pays insurance carriers. This problem has been reported to Congress several times each year since 2018 by an organization called MEDPAC (Medicare Payment Advisory Commission). MEDPAC is an independent agency established by the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 (P.L. 105-33) to advise the U.S. Congress on issues affecting the administration of the Medicare program.

The commission includes 17 members with diverse expertise in the financing and delivery of health care services. Essentially, the commission's mandate is to advise the U.S. Congress on payments to private health plans serving Medicare beneficiaries and the quality of that care.

MEDPAC generally issues two lengthy and comprehensive reports each year directly to the House Speaker and the Senate Majority Leader. One chapter of the report always documents issues with Medicare Advantage.

MEDPAC has frequently criticized how CMS pays carriers that provide Medicare Advantage Plans. Reports by the Commission in 2018 and 2019 discuss the difficulties in evaluating the quality of care in Medicare Advantage.

(Continued on page 5)

Unhealthy Economy Causes Slew of Corporate Bankruptcies

It appears every time you turn on the news these days, especially CNBC or FOX Business, the ticker at the bottom of the screen shows yet another iconic company filing for bankruptcy.

They include some of the biggest and most established brand names: J.C. Penney, Sears, Men's Wearhouse, Ann Taylor. The list goes on.

At the end of 2019, coming into 2020, analysts believed the fundamentals of the economy were resilient, with nearly a decade of sustained growth and millions of new jobs.

Then, in late January, word started coming out of China that they were facing what would soon become a global pandemic – COVID-19. From that moment, companies we had known our entire lives were now at risk of going bankrupt, here and now, in the year 2020.

More than five months into the American experience of the pandemic, the markets are up, but so are corporate bankruptcies. No matter what the economic landscape, one thing is true: companies sometimes go bust, particularly under volatile conditions.

Frontier Communications is one that has filed for bankruptcy, and already been covered here. As of the first week in August 2020, there have been a total of 195 bankruptcies in the telecom industry, including some smaller regional companies such as Alaska Broadband, San Antonio, Texas, based Integrity Communications, and satellite communications provider Intelsat.

Retail brands have been hit especially hard this year, with 43 retail companies filing as of August 4, 2020. According to Standard & Poor's, this is the highest number of bankruptcies since 2011 when, there were 45 filings in the entire year.

The 45 filings recorded in 2011 came as the country was emerging from the Great Recession, when over 900 retail companies filed for bankruptcy from 2008-2011.

Brick-and-mortar retail has been struggling for years with the expansion of e-commerce platforms such as Amazon. It was only a matter of time before we saw a rush of bankruptcies from this key sector – some have even dubbed the last decade leading up to this point as the "retail apocalypse."

Between April and July of 2020, 18 major U.S. companies filed for bankruptcy, according to BankruptcyData, ranging across industries to include restaurant chains, car rental companies, and of course – most recently –retail brands such as Lord & Taylor, the oldest retailer in America, J.C. Penney and Modell's Sporting Goods.

Rental car company Hertz has more than $24.3 billion in liabilities and must sell 200,000 cars to pay back creditors and restructure.

J.C. Penney, a legendary department store with over $7 billion in liabilities, now looks for a sale as opposed to liquidation.

The end of the year promises to be a busy one, especially due to the 2020 presidential election. In years past, the market and economy were often linked to election polling and could change with the latest headline or eventual results of the election.

In reality, over the past five years the number of businesses filing for any type of bankruptcy has actually continued to decrease. Yes, decrease! In 2015, over 26,000 companies filed for bankruptcy, according to United States government data. In 2019, that number dropped to 22,157. Who knows what 2020 holds?

In 2008 we were faced with a man-made crisis, and ultimately, we weathered it. In 2020 it is nature's turn, in the form of a global pandemic.

Don't Miss Out on Verizon Sickness Death Benefit – Know Your Rights

According to LIMRA, formerly the Life Insurance & Market Research Association, nearly 60% of all Americans have some sort of life insurance plan.

If you worked for Verizon and retired from the company, chances are you do too!

It is important that you and your family also know the facts and your rights to a benefit called the Sickness Death Benefit. Your surviving spouse has only one year after a Verizon retiree's death to claim the benefit, or it reverts to Verizon by default.

A surviving dependent, as described in the chart below, can also claim this "benefit," as long as that person has been classified as a dependent. This benefit must be claimed within one year of date of death or it is lost. Verizon does not advertise this benefit and will not bring it up in conversation unless the caller takes the initiative.

This is a "benefit," and should not be confused with insurance.

When an active employee "graduates" to becoming a retiree, that person retires with:

a) A basic life insurance policy;
b) Supplemental Insurance – This insurance is subject to erosion from ages 65 to 70;
c) Sickness and Death Benefit (see chart).

BellTel Board Member Tommy Steed has explained this benefit at every Association member gathering. At each meeting, there is inevitably at least one retiree who has never heard of this sickness/death benefit.

We urge you to call the Benefits Office (855-489-2367). Be specific and say that you are calling to ensure that your surviving spouse, or dependent child, is eligible for the Sickness/Death Benefit upon your death.

Do not accept a confused response about insurance – this benefit is not insurance. If it is established that the benefit applies to you, ask for a letter of confirmation, which will include the amount of payment.

Tommy has pointed out that even for active employees, it is important to know what your sickness death benefit rights are and what your family must do to claim it.

Here is what you need to know:

- The amount of the benefit varies and is based on an employee's job with the company and annual salary in the year that is frozen (see chart);
- The benefit can only be paid to a surviving spouse who is living with you or a dependent child or parent;
- Beneficiaries have only one year after a death to claim the benefit, or it reverts to Verizon by default;
- The benefit is separate from an employee's life insurance.

We have included a chart of death benefits below, which varies between regional Bell Operating Companies. Active employees and retirees may obtain a verification certificate by calling 1-855-489-2367 and asking for the Death Benefits Department.

It is not too late to let your loved ones know they are entitled to this benefit. Obtain the certification letter from Verizon and make sure your loved ones have access to it when it comes time for them to settle your estate.

The actions you take today might make a big economic difference to your survivors. Protect them!

The chart to the left provides additional guidance on the sickness death benefit as it applies to retirees from different operating companies in the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast.

NY/NE Management	Mid-Atlantic Management
▪ Eligible if hired before June 30, 1985 ▪ One-year's pay benefit (pay frozen at June 30, 1985) including bonus ▪ Benefit eliminated for retirements after December 31, 2001 ▪ Mandatory beneficiary includes surviving spouse, dependent child or dependent parent ▪ Paid as a lump sum	▪ Eligible if hired before March 31, 1991 ▪ One-year's pay benefit (pay frozen at December 31, 1991) including bonus ▪ Benefit eliminated for retirements after December 31, 2001 ▪ Mandatory beneficiary includes surviving spouse, dependent child or dependent parent ▪ Paid as a lump sum
NY/NE Associate	**Mid-Atlantic Associate**
▪ Eligible if hired before December 31, 1986 ▪ One-year's pay benefit (pay frozen at December 31, 1986) including differentials and awards ▪ Benefit currently available for future retirements ▪ Mandatory beneficiary includes same household surviving spouse, dependent child or dependent parent ▪ Additional beneficiaries available as long as dependent on participant ▪ Paid as a lump sum, or up to 5 annual installments	▪ Eligible if hired before August 9, 1986 ▪ One-year's pay benefit (final pay with differentials and awards, but capped at $39,000) ▪ Benefit currently available for future retirements ▪ Mandatory beneficiary includes same household surviving spouse, dependent child or dependent parent ▪ Additional beneficiaries available as long as dependent on participant ▪ Paid as a lump sum

Pension Risk Transfer

(Continued from page 1)

When MetLife was called on the carpet for questionable reinsurance deals by the New York State Department of Financial Services, instead of unwinding the questionable transactions, they spun off Brighthouse Financial to serve as a new dumping ground for bad assets, circular reinsurance transactions with affiliates and most of MetLife's retail life insurance and annuity businesses.

If this all sounds complicated, let's think of this in Snoopy terms: Why would MetLife get rid of Snoopy and start calling themselves Brighthouse?

Why would any insurance company toss aside the single most iconic brand in the insurance industry – one they spent decades and a fortune building – if they were not trying to cover up a massive hole in their financial armor?

While it may be hard to believe that MetLife is not a solid corporate citizen, some folks may recall that as recently as 2019 MetLife agreed to pay a $19.75 million penalty to New York State's insurance regulator after confessing that it had failed to pay pensions to more than 13,000 retirees.

MetLife also agreed to return $189 million to individuals in New York that it "forgot" to pay. The Consent Order against MetLife cited violations dating back to 1992!

Very quietly, MetLife added more than $500 million to its policyholder reserves to coverup for the funds they had previously released from reserves after losing track of an incredible 13,000 retirees.

With hundreds of billions at stake it's time to stop playing hide the salami with retirees' pension benefits.

Join the Association of BellTel Retirees and help support our efforts to protect earned benefits for retirees and promote transparency and accountability by life insurers involved in the PRT business.

* * *

So Much for that Lockbox – SSI & Medicare Running Dry

(Continued from page 1)

The Part A trust fund has expended much of its budget to support patients hospitalized by COVID-19 symptoms.

Medicare is sustained by a 1.45% percent payroll tax from employers and employees. Again, payroll taxes are directly impacted by the high number of people unemployed during the economic crisis.

It is unclear what moves Congress might make to solidify these trust funds to protect current and future retirees.

Some believe that Congress would need to increase taxes to address the shortfall. Mark Goldwein, senior vice president of CRFB, predicted Social Security and Medicare will simply provide fewer benefits, in order to keep from going under.

Goldwein adds that Medicare and Social Security could become insolvent even sooner if the unemployment rate continues to increase.

Medicare Advantage Plans – Why so Popular?

(Continued from page 3)

Essentially, MEDPAC contends that these plans create an "uneven playing field between MA and FFS." A perfect example was Villages Health's choice to drop FFS in favor of UHC's MA Plan.

MEDPAC supports dropping the Quality Bonus Points. It has also made recommendations for replacing the uneven treatment of payouts to the MA Plans. One can speculate about why the insurance lobby remains hostile to the recommendations.

The obvious question is: What has Congress been doing with this information? In September 2019, Kaiser Health News brought a federal lawsuit in San Francisco under the Freedom of Information Act to find out.

If Kaiser wins, CMS will be forced to divulge the details of ninety audits never made public. Why would they not have been made public? Audit details are being improperly withheld, although CMS officials have said that they expect to recoup $650 million in overpayments previously made to MA plans.

Why the secrecy? In July 2019, Kaiser Health News reported that Medicare Advantage plans overcharged the government by nearly $30 billion in the past three years alone!

Verizon obviously finds MA plans to be cost effective. We are all herded into either the one from UHC or the one from Aetna. The insurance industry is clearly making money or we would not be seeing the growth shown in the graph. MEDPAC is there to ensure we are getting "the best bang for our buck." Is Congress acting on the reports for which you and I pay?

As your voice and your advocate, I continue to relentlessly badger Congress about what they are doing with recommendations from MEDPAC.

I strongly urge you to ask your own representative the same question. MEDPAC reports and recommendations are also sent to the House Ways & Means Committee and to the Subcommittee on Health, chaired by Rep. Lloyd Doggett (Texas – 35^{th}).

We taxpayers fund the important services and work provided by MEDPAC. Let's make sure Congress is doing their job!

Financial Appeal:
To Outpace COVID, We Require Your Support

By Don Kaufmann

Summer often evokes memories of slower-paced times. With the current pandemic, we are all experiencing a change of pace in our activities. Thankfully, your Association of BellTel Retirees continues to work effectively for our members in these difficult times.

Our staff has not slowed down one bit. In fact, they have gone the extra mile to provide assistance to our members dealing with unprecedented conditions created by the pandemic.

Our entire organization takes seriously our role to protect the pensions and benefits we all earned during our working years.

At times, this requires a strong advocate to stand up to Verizon and remind the company that we were essential contributors to where they are today.

None of us wants to speculate about how successful individual retirees would be trying to represent themselves against Verizon. As the backbone of a nationwide movement supporting all retirees, the Association has been your advocate in defending current and future retirees from Verizon's attempts to undermine our retirement security.

Our work continues through the pandemic, which has created uncertainties that may further put your benefits at risk. During these troubled times, we continue to work on health care issues, to push our proxy battles to protest Verizon's obscenely large executive bonuses; and protest Verizon policies that have worked to the disadvantage of retirees.

The Association is powered by a team of extraordinary retiree volunteers working tirelessly on your behalf, as advocates and as a resource to help you navigate your own benefits. Think about the consequences of a world without us acting as your support and voice.

We greatly appreciate your past generous donations and urge you to continue to help in 2020, if you have not done so already.

Think about the consequences of a world without us acting as your support and voice.

In a nutshell, we need your continued support, so we can continue to help you.

Remember, there are many different ways to help us financially:

- You can make donations directly—these are tax deductible, as we are a non-profit.
- You can make a Qualified Charitable Donations from your IRA, which are tax-deductible and will help to minimize you Required Minimum Deduction
- “Add a Buck” to your regular donation to help offset fees associated with credit card donations.
- You can participate in the AmazonSmile program – designating the Association as your non-profit of choice - which contributes a small percentage of your purchases to us, at zero cost to you.
- You can make the Association a recipient of a Legacy donation, supporting the next generation of retirees for decades into the future.

Whichever form of financial support works best for you, we certainly need it, we appreciate it, we will use it to support and fight for you, and we thank you for your generosity! And yes, you can certainly use more than one donation option if you wish.

Thank you again and we look so forward to seeing you when the virus is well behind us and no longer a threat. Until then, please do what you can financially.

Let’s be sure to keep OUR Association of BellTel Retirees strong and united to protect our retirement future.

OUR MISSION:

The Association of BellTel Retirees Inc. is dedicated to promoting the protection and enhancement of the pensions and benefits for all retirees and beneficiaries of the companies and subsidiaries that make up the Verizon and Idearc/Super-Media/Dex Media Corporations.

The Association will convince the company to properly care for its thousands of dedicated former union and management employees.

The Association will conduct activities designed to educate elected federal, state and local representatives and promote the passage of legislation which will protect and guarantee, rather than invade our hard-earned pension and benefits fund.

ASSOCIATION OF BELLTEL RETIREES
P.O. Box 61, Glen Head, NY 11545-0061

I want to support the Association of BellTel Retirees Inc. in the fight to protect the pensions and benefits of all retirees and active employees. Enclosed is my tax-deductible donation:

❏ **$100** ❏ **$50** ❏ **$40** ❏ **OTHER** ____________ **We appreciate any amount you can donate**

Or use your credit card: VISA MASTERCARD DISC AMEX

Acct.#__________/__________/__________/________ Expiration Date_____ Zip Code: _________

Please consider adding $1.00 or more to help offset costly transaction fees and ensuring your donation will fund the work we do on your behalf.

Name____

Address____ City/State/Zip Code________________________

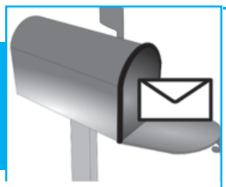
E-mail____ Telephone #______________________________

I am a: Management retiree _____ Union retiree ______ Other _____ Company Retired from:______ Year Retired: ________

You can also donate online by going to www.belltelretirees.org and click on the DONATE NOW button.
Consider a recurring donation – an easy and safe way to budget your contribution.
The Association of BellTel Retirees Inc is a 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization.

Fall 2020

MEMBER MAILBAG



If you are a Telephone retiree and are not supporting and contributing to Jack Cohen and the dedicated hard working BellTel Retirees Association, you should be ashamed of yourself. They are and have been the only ones working and fighting for us. A great big thanks for all their work from me, an 18-year Verizon retiree.

Rod Castle via YouTube

* * *

Thank you very much for doing the Zoom (Massachusetts member) meeting. It was very informative, as usual. I realize a lot of work has been put into this presentation, and I appreciate that very much.

Thank you again.

P.J. Devine

* * *

I started working for New England Telephone Co. as an operator in 1963. One of my fondest memories was when I took a call from a pay phone. In those days, the booths had bi-fold doors. Picture if a person fell inside and could not get up that the door would need to be removed.

We sent an installer to remove the door so the gentleman could get out. 20 minutes later, I picked up a call from the same pay phone and it was the gentleman thanking us for our help… then he fell again, and we had to get the police department involved to take him home.

A week later, I had a call from another pay phone. The gentleman had lost a dime and demanded that I return it. I told him I could have it sent to him if he would like to give me his name and address. He said, "I want it immediately," and hung up the phone. This was at 11:00 PM.

The next thing we knew, there was someone at our building demanding a dime. We had to get the police involved again. I was an operator for 10 years, then got a job in the CO. I was one of the first women in the craft in Vermont. I retired in 1991.

Susan Harrington
Shaftsbury, VT

* * *

Dear Association,

Thanks for all you do and to all the folks working behind the scenes.

When we lost Josephine Bellina, we lost the "glue" keeping the Downstate Directory group alive. John Narmento was also essential in keeping the group alive. We were unable to get a volunteer to replace Jo-so we folded.

I remember your visit to us one year ago at our meeting. Your continued efforts are appreciated, though I am sure you are not thanked enough by those who appreciate your efforts.

Pat Desmond

* * *

When I retired from New England Telephone in 1990, I was promised two things:

1. A pension that would increase on a periodic basis. The formula was every three years the cost of living for the period was divided in half and an adjustment for that amount was made to the pension. Well, I got an adjustment at the end of 1990.

Since I was retired only for 6 months, I received only 1/6th of the percentage added to my pension. I accepted the facts, assuming in three years I would get the full amount. Would you believe that the gross pension amount from 6/1/91 until this year hasn't changed by as much as a nickel?

Not only that, our pensions have been disposed of to a mutual company so no more increases plus the loss of any ERISA protection!

2. Another promise was medical protection. Things were fine until 2 years ago, when Verizon decided to start charging for medical insurance unless one gave up his/her existing service and went with their choice. I have been with my current company for over 40 years and like it, so I opted for the $600 annual payment to keep my own insurance. This year the assessment went up to around $1,000!

I can hardly wait for next year! I am not young, have had several medical problems but I am managing.

I cannot and will not forget the broken promises made by NYNEX and Verizon. I think they broke faith with their former management employees. They seem to forget that it was people like myself who built the Bell System. Oh well, you live and learn!!!!

John Williams via YouTube

Member Survey: 90%-Plus Say Health Benefit Access Key. 15% Confirm Covid.

(Continued from page 1)

though at the time it was not identified as such. That was back at the end of January."

Addressing the resulting economics of the virus and impact on our cost of living, one member advised, "I am always concerned about my pension and health benefits. Due to the virus, prices have gone up 10 to 20 percent for necessities. The money does not go far these days."

In our original March-April survey an overwhelming 70.5% felt that the medical services and healthcare options available to them in their own communities were suitable with the threat of COVID-19 looming. However, in the follow-up poll, a fair number criticized their regional health providers and expressed the need for more and better resources.

This prompted one member to say, "the BellTel organization should focus mainly on maintaining our health coverage."

What about a COLA? While we didn't ask the question, so many retirees chimed in and added their own commentary about the need for a COLA. In fact, as if all at the same time, there was an onslaught of members, saying loud and clear that the time is ripe for a COLA, with several saying that company leaders are apparently giving these to themselves, but certainly not to retirees.

Regarding just how important the protection of your earned retirement health benefits were, we asked and you answered, very loudly with an almost tsunami-like response, 90.6% (or 2,225) of respondents saying this needs to be a key agenda item by the Association.

5.4% of other members addressing this told us that they no longer receive any employer–provided health benefits.

In addition, we received thousands of other comments, suggestions, ideas and, yes, quite a few complaints. We want to say to you that it is fine and healthy to complain and everyone needs an outlet to do so.

Like all of you, we are in the same boat. We are ALL VOLUNTEERS, donating our time in retirement to fight back for our shared economic protection. Some of us may have taken a lump sum buyout, and have no pensions to fight for anymore, but there are lots of other rights and benefits we earned and were guaranteed.

Others of us on the board had our pensions de-risked, stripped, and transferred to an annuity provider, while some are still under the relative security of the Verizon pension umbrella. And we also have volunteers and board members who retired from companies all across the telecommunication industry.

I offer all of that to make a point. Regardless of the company from which you retired: AT&T, Lucent, Verizon, Directory Operations, Bell Labs, Western Electric, Dex Media and so many more, we are all come from the same background, or family tree, if you will, and need to look out for one another, as you might for a neighbor who has taken ill.

Please do your part to help keep us active and fighting for you. Contribute as you can. Volunteer as your capabilities allow. Be a vocal advocate and recruit new members among your friends and former colleagues. Every bit you can contribute and muscle you can lend, is so appreciated.

Tough Times Continue at Frontier Communications

We reported in our Spring 2020 newsletter that Frontier Communications was filing for bankruptcy.

In 2009, Frontier acquired $8.6 billion in access line assets from Verizon, located in South Carolina, Washington, Oregon, and 11 other states, which also included the transfer of 11,000 employees and many retirees.

Many of these assets were wireline copper landlines, and DSL in less densely populated rural communities, as the industry had already begun to migrate to more digital connectivity.

With that 2009 acquisition, the carrier went from an estimate of 1.5 million customers, across twelve states, to more than double that.

Other customer service lines included in the acquisition were in Arizona, Idaho, North Carolina, Nevada, Michigan, West Virginia, Ohio, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, and some in California.

In 2010, The BellTel Newsletter reported on some of the problems the carrier was having in integrating and wrapping its arms around these former Verizon assets.

Frontier, now based in Norwalk, CT, officially filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in April 2020, which allows the company to continue operating while beginning to pay down an estimated $17.5 billion in debt.

The company still has 17,000 employees. At the market close on the final day of trading in July, Frontier's total market value was $9.5 billion or about half of its debt owed, and its stock traded at $1.25 per share.

Frontier recently secured $1.3 billion, with the sale of landline, cell tower, and copper wire assets in Idaho, Oregon, and Montana to Ziply Fiber. 900 Frontier employees were transferred to Ziply.

Despite its astronomical debt, senior Frontier Communication executives still somehow received $38 million in bonuses this past May.

Spokesperson Jane Mendoza said, "Frontier is evaluating its capital structure with an eye to reducing debt and interest expense, so as to be able to better serve our customers. Our customers should expect no changes as we remain focused on providing quality communications services."

However, according to the Attorneys General in Minnesota and Washington State, that hasn't happened. Officials say that Frontier deceived customers about its prices and the quality of its phone and internet services.

The company was hit with over $1.6 million in fines and must to invest $10 million, over the next four years, to improve its broadband service.

Meanwhile, it has lost 120,000 subscribers in the last 18 months, while also reporting an $87 million loss, in 2019.

Given the bankruptcy, the sell-off of assets, and customer erosion, it's rather hard to see how the senior executives could possibly be due $38 million in bonuses. Once again, it will likely be workers and loyal retirees who suffer the most from yet another asset sell-off by Verizon.

Sweating the Pandemic, More Dive Into Retirement Pool

If you were thinking about working longer because that makes more sense for you, financially, in order to further secure your retirement, there are likely fewer options on the horizon.

The number of years someone works can impact their retirement. As we all know, for Social Security, once a person turns 62, they are able to receive 75% of their full annual benefits.

A recent study by TD Ameritrade found that many people still in the workplace, say they will need to work longer to afford retirement, citing the anxiety of financial insecurity as a result of COVID-19.

The analysis found that 37% of Baby Boomers and 39% of Generation X (people born between the mid 1960's and the late 1970's) had already or were planning to delay retirement.

Their options have suddenly become more limited.

Between 2014 and 2016, an estimated 50% of workers who retired between the age of 55 and 65, were forced into retirement by health complications or layoffs.

According to Richard Johnson, Director of the Retirement Policy at the Urban Institute, many companies are reluctant to hire older workers, based on concerns about the costs associated with their employment, their technical capabilities, and cost of reinvesting in their training, given their proximity to retirement age.

With the pandemic, Johnson says, companies have even more reasons not to hire older, more experienced workers.

"Unlike previous recessions, this pandemic-led downturn has hit older workers especially hard and will likely create long-term employment challenges for them," he said.

He added that the combined rate of unemployment and underemployment for workers over age 65 is 26%, 5 points higher than for employees ages 25 to 54, the largest gap between the two groups since 1948.

Laurie McCann, a senior attorney for AARP, which provides legal consultation for the organization, says "Older workers already faced much longer periods of unemployment than younger workers before the pandemic. Employers will be more reticent to hire older workers who may be more vulnerable to illness."

With reduced job prospects, many older workers are confronted with the challenge of entering retirement earlier than anticipated.

An April report from the University of Chicago's Booth School of Business found that 60% of people over 55 who were laid off in April have chosen to retire, an increase from January, when that figure was 53%. According to Michael Weber, a Professor at Booth and one of the study's co-authors, among this group, most were 65 and older, indicating that barriers to employment increase with age.

In April, the National Bureau of Economic Research, noted that "we see a large increase in those who claim to be retired. This makes early retirement a major force in accounting for the decline in the labor-force participation. It suggests that the onset of the Covid-19 crisis led to a wave of earlier than planned retirements."