

Retired Member Edition Summer 2024

## Understanding OPERS Processes

Here at OPERS, we try our best to answer all our members' questions with straightforward honesty and empathy. When asked why a process is the way it is, we don't say: "Well that is the way we have always done it." We have created this FAQ to help demystify five processes we are regularly asked about.



### Why do I have to submit vital documents to OPERS when my HR department already has these?

For privacy reasons, a universal document cloud doesn't exist for employees of the State of Oklahoma and its county and local employers. To protect the security of your information, your HR department may not be able to share your records with an OPERS employee. Likewise, OPERS will never share the documents you send us with anyone. You will need to provide certain vital documents to OPERS when you retire. Visit [opers.ok.gov/retirement-process](https://opers.ok.gov/retirement-process) for more information.

### What is an original signature? Why do I need it on some documents and not others?

Simply put, an original signature is made with ink and not electronically. As a general rule, we require

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Oklahoma Public Employees Retirement System

### DIRECTOR'S CORNER

Joseph A. Fox, Executive Director

As I write this, spring has come to an end, and summer promises to be as hot and humid as all Oklahoma summers are. In this newsletter, you may notice a theme – a holistic highlight of wellness. We often talk about our work to maintain and advocate for a strong, healthy retirement system. Retirement and financial planning also includes a wellness component - planning for how long and how healthy we will be in retirement. We want to encourage fitness for our members in all aspects of their lives. Though we explore financial wellness, including our processes, we move onto other important topics with an understanding that our members are concerned with many things beyond retirement. We acknowledge our members live vibrant and unique lives outside of our purview.

Seemingly endless summer breaks, like the ones of my elementary days, do not exist for most of us. Work continues and eventually, the seasons change. While we are here on the precipice of warmer days, let us

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# Keeping Yourself Safe on Social Apps



You've heard it before – online safety is crucial. Most advice is geared towards adults focus on keeping your financial accounts secure. However, the use of social and romance apps by scammers who target retired individuals is on the rise. In fact, the FTC reported losses totaling \$1.14 billion in 2023. With this in mind, we have five tips regarding online safety focused on social and dating apps.

## Keep your communication on the app

Be aware that scammers or "catfishers" (a term used to describe someone who creates fake personal profiles on social apps or sites) will try to push the conversation elsewhere, like to a text thread using your personal phone number. Moving the conversation off an app allows scammers to send pictures, links, or attachments that are not monitored by the app or website.

## The block and delete button is your friend

While it may seem rude, remember that in-person rules of etiquette also apply to online interactions. If someone uses inflammatory language, acts inappropriately towards you or makes you uncomfortable, you should block and report them as soon as possible. Trust your instinct! And remember that you deserve to feel safe online.

## Video chat or phone call before meeting

Whether you are meeting a potential bridge partner or a dinner date, confirm their identity before meeting in-person to keep you safe. A quick phone call as opposed to a text is a simple step. If your new friend or date seems averse to the idea, or outright refuses, you'll know to block and delete them without a second thought.

## Take precautions meeting in-person

It is always a good rule, when meeting someone new, platonically or romantically, to tell a third party where you're going. Take a screenshot of your date's profile and send it to a trusted friend. Let them know when and where you are going, as well as how long you expect the meeting to last. Setting up these details, as well as looping in a confidante, can free your mind up to enjoy yourself and be in the moment.

## Remember to have fun!

Though these tips are cautionary, remember that online dating is about connection, a good experience and offers mental health benefits. As long as you exercise sound judgment and keep true to your boundaries, there is a whole world out there to explore.

Senior Fraud Complaint forms are now available on the Oklahoma Attorney General's Office website at [oag.ok.gov](https://oag.ok.gov).



*The legislation passed this year directly impacting members of OPERS only affects active (currently employed under OPERS) members. More information on current and historical legislation can be viewed at [opers.ok.gov/legislation](https://opers.ok.gov/legislation).*

## Understanding OPERS Processes

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an original signature on forms directing how money will be paid out. This is both for legal reasons and a facet of our member-focused approach. We want to protect you and your retirement.

### Why are taxes withheld from my benefit?

An OPERS retirement benefit is considered income for federal and State tax purposes. OPERS does not create these rules. Instead, federal, specifically IRS, and state laws require a mandatory withholding unless you file a withholding preference with OPERS. For more information visit [opers.ok.gov/taxes](https://opers.ok.gov/taxes).

### Why do I have to submit a form to change my address and other personal information instead of providing the update over the phone or through email?

We can apply the principles of the original signature to address and personal information changes. Though it may seem inconvenient, the added step of the form is another layer of security. This helps us verify that the member, and not someone on their behalf, knowingly or unknowingly, requested the change.



### Why is my choice of a benefit option and joint annuitant locked in at the time of retirement?

Members who have reached age and service requirements may receive a lifetime benefit at retirement. What happens to the benefit after their death is decided by the retirement option they choose. The amount of benefits payable under each option is based on the ages of the member and the joint annuitant as of the retirement date. As the calculations of each option are actuarially equivalent, your choices are locked in at the time of retirement.

Alongside this, Oklahoma State statutes (74 O.S. § 918) require a member to choose their option prior to retirement, and a specific person must be designated as joint annuitant at the time of election of Option A or Option B. For more information, visit [opers.ok.gov/retirement-options](https://opers.ok.gov/retirement-options).

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## Direct Deposit Dates

Retired members receive their monthly payments via direct deposit on the last working day of each month. You may change your direct deposit information at any time by completing a Direct Deposit Authorization form, which can be obtained by calling (405) 858-6737 or (800) 733-9008.

The completed Direct Deposit Authorization form is due by the 5th of the month for your payment to be direct deposited into your account for that month. We recommend not closing the old account until your monthly benefit has cleared the new account. Once a new direct deposit form is received, any returned checks will be reissued along with the current monthly benefit at the end of the month.

### DIRECT DEPOSIT DATES

2024	2025
July 31	January 31
August 30	February 28
September 30	March 31
October 31	April 30
November 29	May 30
December 31	June 30

# Healthy Living, One Month at a Time

Staying on top of your health is one part of having a lasting and fulfilling retirement. To highlight this we have compiled a list of health awareness months reminding you to take care of yourself, one month at a time.

### July: World Brain Day

Tending to the health of your brain prevents or reduces the impact of disabilities and neurological diseases. Learning a hobby, keeping social connections, and getting plenty of sleep are just a few ways to keep your brain in shape.

### August: National Eye Exam Month

Staying on top of a yearly eye exam allows you to prevent or manage eye-related systems or diseases such as glaucoma, retinopathy, and others.

### September: Prostate Cancer Awareness Month

Though one in eight men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer, it has a five-year survival rate of 90% if detected early. Annual physicals can help with detection and treatment options.

### October: Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Breast cancer accounts for 30% of all cancers among women. Yearly mammograms after 40 years old and genetic testing can help with early detection, better treatment options and survival.

### November: National COPD Month

Chronic pulmonary disease (COPD) affects 16 million adults. COPD is a group of diseases that block airflow to the lungs and comes about due to tobacco use, pneumonia, or air pollution.

### December: Handwashing Awareness Month

Handwashing has the power to reduce or prevent diseases from passing onto you and others. While this may sound elementary, the CDC reports that consistent washing with soap and water could prevent nearly one million deaths a year.

### January: National Blood Donor Month

Blood donation is crucial for people suffering from blood disorders, involved in disasters, or other medical issues. It is a valuable life-giving gift, especially for those with a rare blood type.

### February: National Heart Month

Taking care of your heart is crucial during every stage of your life. Diet, exercise and working with your doctor may help regulate high blood pressure (also known as the "silent killer"). Knowing the signs of a heart attack and stroke can increase your chance of survival.

### March: National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month

Colorectal cancer is becoming one of the fastest-growing diagnosed cancers in the United States. It is important to start screening at 45 years old (previously 50 years old) or younger if you have a history in your family.

### April: National Autism Month

Autism spectrum disorder is not a diagnosis specific to children. The CDC estimates 1 in 45 adults have a form of autism. Characteristics can include behavioral issues, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), anxiety, or depression.

### May: Mental Health Awareness Month\*

From dealing with stress to healing from grief, more Americans are adding therapy and behavior modifications into their overall wellness plan.

### June: National Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Awareness Month\*

We usually connect PTSD with veterans who served our country. But, PTSD can affect anyone experiencing physical, professional or emotional trauma. The same treatment options used for mental health services can be applied to those suffering from PTSD.

\*If you or someone you know needs mental health services, please call or text 988.





## Beneficiary Reminder

An out-of-date beneficiary designation puts you at risk of your money going to a person you may not have intended. If you can't remember who your beneficiaries are, this is a good indication you should make a new designation. Major life events like a move, marriage, or death may also be a good reminder to revisit your beneficiary selections.

OPERS pays out a \$5,000 Death Benefit to the named beneficiary(s), upon the death of a retired member. In some cases, there may be also be a final benefit payment and excess contributions paid to those named on your designation.

To view and print the beneficiary designation forms, visit our website at [opers.ok.gov/forms](https://opers.ok.gov/forms).

For more information about the OPERS death benefits, visit [opers.ok.gov/death-benefits](https://opers.ok.gov/death-benefits).

## Need to Change Your Address?

If this newsletter was sent to an old or incorrect address, you can submit an update online! The digital Change of Address form saves members time as well as paper and postage.

Digital forms are easy to use and look similar to a fillable PDF. Simply complete the required fields, add an electronic signature and click submit. A valid email address is required for OPERS to receive the form. The next step is to digitally "sign" the form by going to your email and following the steps to verify your email address. Once the electronic signature is verified, the form is submitted and received at OPERS.

One feature of the Change of Address form is that it will validate the mailing address against the USPS cutting down on errors. As an added layer of security, we will also send confirmation letters to both the old and new address.

Change of Address form: [opers.ok.gov/forms](https://opers.ok.gov/forms).

## Wellness Tips from THRIVE

Since the start of the COVID pandemic, stress and burnout has been on the rise. According to the World Health Organization, this has caused a 25% increase in anxiety and depression prevalence. When you feel the effects of stress or burnout, take a moment to try one of these simple activities:

- Practice deep-relaxation breathing;
- Know what is in your control to adjust or change;
- Guided meditation or mindfulness activities;
- Get out and play;
- Make sure you have strong social support;
- Laugh often.

Incorporating exercise into your daily routine has many benefits that also help manage and decrease stress:

- Improves mood and emotional well-being;
- Promotes better sleep;
- Improves immune and brain function;
- More energy to do regular activities without getting tired;
- Boosts your metabolism.

**FOR THE  
HEALTH  
OF IT**

*...because you can*

**Thrive**

OKLAHOMA EMPLOYEE WELLNESS



This article was written in partnership with our friends at THRIVE.

THRIVE is the State employee wellness program with a mission to improve and enhance the overall well-being of State employees. While the program was created for State employees, the website and most of the resources are available to the general public.

As part of their financial wellness series, OPERS will appear as a guest on the "For the Health of It" Podcast on August 27. Look for our episode and resources to manage stress at [oklahoma.gov/thrive](https://oklahoma.gov/thrive).

# Getting to Know Oklahoma

In appreciation for our great state, we put together a list of six historical and archaeologically relevant places you can visit within the Sooner State. These sites can be great budget-friendly daytrips or retirement adventures inspiring us to take in the world that closely surrounds us. While they may not always be the most glamorous, they speak to the enduring spirit of the people who created and maintain the sites.



**Woolaroc Museum & Wildlife Preserve**  
Bartlesville, OK

The Woolaroc Museum presents one of the world's most unique collections of art. Whether it is Native American pottery or collections of Colt firearms, this 3,700 acre wildlife preserve is also home to more than 30 varieties of native and exotic animals and birds.



**The Cave House**  
Tulsa, OK

Built as a chicken restaurant in 1924, this prohibition-era marvel of quirky architecture is best enjoyed by scheduling a private tour. It is filled to the brim with interesting and amusing stories.

**Spiro Mounds Archaeological Center**  
Spiro, OK

This mounds site is the only prehistoric Native American archaeological site in Oklahoma open to the public. The mounds are one of the most important Native American sites in the nation and are often cited as an enduring mystery.

**Edwards Store**  
Red Oak, OK

Built in the 1850s, the Edwards Store is known as the last original surviving structure on the 192-mile Butterfield Overland stage line. It carried passengers and the U.S. mail between St. Louis and San Francisco and remains an emblem of railroad expansion.



**The Old Round Barn**  
Arcadia, OK

Built in 1898, this vintage architectural feat is packed with history, antiques, souvenirs, and craftsman farm tools. According to local legend, the Barn is the most photographed attraction on all of Route 66.

**Will Rogers Birthplace Ranch (Iron Dog Ranch)**  
Oologah, OK

This historical Greek Revival-style house and 162-acre working ranch provides a lovely view over Lake Oologah, as well as providing a unique glimpse into the life of vaudeville performer and famous Oklahoman, Will Rogers.

# Member Portal Frequently Asked Questions

OPERS launched a member portal in January to allow members access to important documents such as member statements, benefit notices, and 1099-R tax statements. More features are coming. Until then, here is a brief guide to help you sign up and get the most out of your account.

## How do I get to the Member Portal?

Click on "Member Portal Login" in the upper right of the OPERS website ([opers.ok.gov](https://opers.ok.gov)).

## How do I create my Member Portal Account?

You can register your Member Portal account online by clicking the "Register" button at [opers.ok.gov/member-portal](https://opers.ok.gov/member-portal).

## What is my username?

Your Member Portal username is your OPERS Member ID, which you can find on any recent document you have received from OPERS.

If you already have an account, click the "Forgot Username?" link on the Member Portal login screen.

We will send your username to the email address on your account if the information you provide matches our records.

## I forgot my password.

To reset your password, click "Forgot Password?" on the Member Portal home page. Once you verify your information, you will receive an email with a temporary password.

## Who can access my account? If I have power of attorney, can I access it as well?

At this time, only OPERS and URSJJ members can register an online account. We will never provide access to a third party, including a spouse or caregiver. Do not share your username and password with anyone. If you have power of attorney, please contact us for more information.

For more information on the Member Portal, go to [opers.ok.gov/member-portal](https://opers.ok.gov/member-portal).

## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

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We would love to hear about your experience with retirement and planning. You could be featured in a future Member Spotlight. Go to [opers.ok.gov/member-spotlight](https://opers.ok.gov/member-spotlight).

OPERS would like to wish a Happy 50th Wedding Anniversary to Jim and his wife!

**Name:** James "Jim" (Retired 10 years)

### What is something you did not expect about retirement?

So many people dread retirement, and so I went in with those stories looming large in my mind. But retirement has been phenomenal for me! I expected to be bored; I didn't expect to love it so much.

### How does retirement compare to how you imagined it to be?

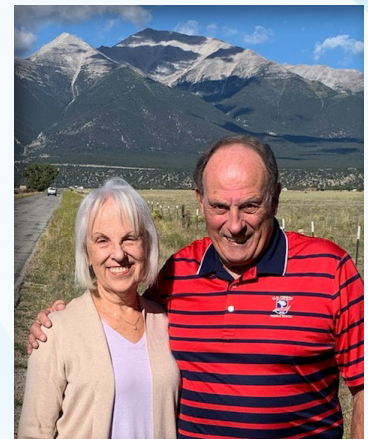
It's quiet much of the time. My new work can be physically demanding and that is an incentive to remain physically fit.

### What is one piece of advice you would give to another member considering retirement?

Do not let yourself grow bored. Have something lined up. Also: stop spending money you don't have. Live within a budget. There are obviously extenuating circumstances, but as my grandmother said, "Even if you make a dollar you need to put ten cents away."

### What is something you have accomplished in retirement?

I was selected last fall as Urban Mission's Volunteer of the Year. I started volunteering for them through RSVP (Retired Senior Volunteer Program). Now, I have been volunteering at the food pantry two days a week for nine years!





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**Article Idea? Comments?**

We want to hear from you!  
[newsletter@opers.ok.gov](mailto:newsletter@opers.ok.gov)

## DIRECTOR'S CORNER

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all take a moment to turn inward, and think about the ways in which we can better care for ourselves. Whether it be mental, physical, or emotional health, OPERS hopes to be an advocate for resources that will serve our members well. Even our articles about historical sites in Oklahoma have a bend of wellness – that of meeting yourself, and the place you find yourself in, with curiosity and kindness.

As always, our main priority is to see all our members achieve a secure and lasting retirement and have the overall wellbeing to enjoy it.

My final summer encouragement to you is to find time to focus on your own wellness and to warmly encourage those around you to do the same.

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