

ACSSQUARTERLY

Q4 2018

Elnora Fretwell

After over 29 years in state service, retired ACSS Executive Vice President Elnora Fretwell shares how she made a difference with her courage and determination to help others.



CalSTRS called its management staff employees to take a tour of the new building that had just finished construction in 2009. In attendance were many Executive leaders of CalSTRS, as well as the CEO. After the tour they returned to the Ziggurat building to provide feedback before staff moved into the new building. Everyone was looking for a place to sit. Elnora scanned the room and noticed that no one was sitting next to the CEO. She decided to sit down next to him. She struck a casual

conversation with him and eventually he said, "Elnora, I'd like to hear from you first because you always have something to say." Elnora replied, "Well, I do have a suggestion. I think the management staff needs to have security screens to put over their monitors so that personal account information can't be seen by someone walking behind them. It will help protect privacy of our accounts." The CEO nodded and replied, "That is a good idea! You always have something good to say and it makes sense."

(Continued inside...)

Elnora has always been the type of person who voluntarily stands up in a crowd and broadcasts, "I have something to say!" Or, "I have a question to ask!" She never walks away without fully understanding the scope of the situation. It is this constant craving for knowledge and desire to be involved that made her a successful leader in ACSS.

MOVING ON UP

Elnora Fretwell had been a supervisor at CalSTRS for over 27 years, a career of over 29 and 1/2 years total in State Service, working at CalSTRS her entire career. Born and raised in Oakland, she moved to Sacramento with her three young children and husband. When her husband passed away, Elnora knew she needed a good stable job to survive. She saw a poster on a bulletin board that advertised state job openings and she decided to apply. CalSTRS (California State Teachers Retirement System) hired her as a temporary seasonal employee. They immediately noticed her potential and saw her level of dedication so they offered her a permanent position as a rank-and-file Office Assistant in the Central Records Department of CalSTRS. After 6 months, she promoted to a Micro Tech I, then soon after promoted to a Micro Tech II. Shortly after that, she got promoted to her first supervisory position as a Senior Micro Film Technician. The Senior Micro Tech position was the first step in her supervisory career. After that, she moved up through the Office Services Supervisor I, II and III classifications.

In the Central Records Department, Elnora has seen a wide range of technology to process records over the years. In the beginning, her job entailed entering member information into the database via microfiche. She worked with microfilm to retrieve records. When someone needed a record, she would find it and print the information from the microfiche. As technology changed, the State began storing records via imaging. Elnora was part of a large-scale conversion project to convert data from microfiche to imaging. Elnora supervised the project and her department converted over 86 million documents. It was a huge success.

After her tenure in the Records Department, Elnora was promoted to a Business Supervisor Officer I position (BSOI) which ordered supplies and managed other business aspects of CalSTRS. A few more years passed and she promoted up to BSOII, where she got an opportunity to go back to the Imaging Record department. She remained there until retirement in October 2018.

A FREE COFFEE CUP

When Elnora became a supervisor, she was not aware that ACSS existed. While talking to a co-worker in the cafeteria, she noticed her co-worker's ACSS coffee mug. Elnora asked what ACSS was. The co-worker described ACSS and said, "If you sign up with ACSS, you can get a free coffee cup." A huge fan of freebies, Elnora signed up for ACSS still not knowing exactly what ACSS could do for her. But it got her foot in the door.

When she went on a tour of CalPERS, she struck up a conversation with a fellow ACSS member who was a supervisor at CalPERS. The CalPERS employee mentioned that the local Sacramento ACSS Chapter was in need of Delegates for the upcoming Delegate Assembly and she encouraged Elnora to become a Delegate. Elnora had never been to a Chapter meeting nor knew what Delegate Assembly was. Inspired by the CalPERS employee's suggestion, Elnora gave it some thought and said to herself, "I

have an opportunity to make decisions about my life. I can find out answers about my job. I can learn more about my benefits. Other people are making those decisions for me and I am not. I don't want to sit on the sidelines anymore. I want to see what's going on." The next thing she did was go to the Sacramento Chapter meeting and nominate herself as a Delegate for Delegate Assembly, and she got elected as an official Delegate. This was the first step in her long term involvement with ACSS leadership.

CRAVING MORE, DOING MORE

Even at that first Delegate Assembly meeting, Elnora still did not know much about ACSS, but she listened. She became very interested in what she learned about ACSS and wanted to become more involved. She decided to join some of the ACSS committees to learn more. Throughout her membership, Elnora experienced every committee within ACSS – Communications Committee, Membership Development Committee, Fiscal Committee, and the PAC and Legislative Committee. She attended as many Chapter meetings as she could, eager to learn more. After learning a great amount about ACSS and being heavily involved in the Association, she turned her sights on the Board of Directors. She ran for a Board position for Chapter 503 and was elected into the ACSS Board of Directors. In the last 9 years, she served as Executive Vice President of ACSS before she retired in October of 2018.

"ACSS offers so much more. When you go to chapter meetings, there are other supervisors there that you can bond with and talk about similar things in your jobs. You can share your stories and they can give you advice.

It's an extra community that you have to bond with and feel that you're not all by yourself. At your job, you may feel alone. And you may not want to talk to your other supervisors about your situation because you think that it could leak back to your manager. In those situations, you can come to ACSS and find fellow comrades who have all been through similar situations and you can feel comfortable talking to them," said Elnora.

Not only did Elnora provide advice and support to fellow excluded employees, she also gave advice to rank and file employees who were having issues with their supervisors. "Rank and file would talk to me because they thought I was fair. I provided insight from the other perspective. I gave them advice to make life easier for their supervisors. I would talk to them and tell them how to get along with their supervisors. I would explain their rights and their supervisor's rights. I helped make their relationships better. I felt good when they would come back to me and say that it worked out. I didn't want them to go into their situation with the wrong information. They thought that I was a big help. I felt like I made a difference. I always try to be fair and honest."

ACSS AT HER SIDE

As Elnora learned more about ACSS, she also learned about her rights as a Supervisor. For part of her employment as an excluded



ACSS President Frank Ruffino and Elnora Fretwell at the September 2018 Board Meeting.

employee, she worked an Alternate Workweek Schedule (AWS). Then, she went back to the regular schedule. After a few years, Elnora decided she wanted to go back to the AWS schedule. Upon this request, there was a conflict between management about her going back to AWS. Since Elnora was heavily involved with ACSS, she knew her rights and sought ACSS for representation services. She ended up not winning her case, but it wasn't at the fault of ACSS. CalSTRS had changed their policy that her classification could not be on AWS. "ACSS did a wonderful job representing me and my representative helped me out. I stuck to the rules. I didn't want to lose my job so I always did the right thing."

She goes on to say, "You need to join ACSS because as an excluded employee, you have employees and you have a boss. You have two sides against you. It's not like rank and file where you just have a supervisor. When you become a supervisor, you have two bosses, maybe three. So, you need to be protected because you don't know what can happen. Anything could happen. Uncooperative staff is the hardest to deal with. They are going to challenge you, even if you do everything right. You need ACSS at your back just in case you need help with that challenge. If you are doing the right thing while ACSS is standing beside you, you will feel confident in your job."

.....
"By doing what's right and speaking my mind, I inspired someone else. I didn't know I was capable of that."
.....

A WELL-OILED MACHINE

Elnora says her greatest accomplishment was serving as Executive Vice President of ACSS. In 2011, there were retirements on the Statewide Executive Committee that left the VP position vacant. People suggested to Elnora that she should run for Vice President. At first, she said "No, I didn't come here to be Vice President." But people kept encouraging her: "It made me feel good and thought to myself, 'Well, I guess they see something in me more than what I see in myself. I could be vice president of a Statewide Organization's office. That's something big.'" So, she was nominated and ran for the Executive position of Vice President. It was a tie. It came down to a nail-biting re-vote. On the second vote, she won. It was overwhelming for her, but she was honored that amidst the fierce competition, people voted for her:

"I knew I could still help people and make a difference as Vice President. ACSS President Arlene Espinoza and I struggled for a while. At that time men were mostly in charge. But now, here we were – President and Vice President – two women in charge, leading. There was a shift. We worked hard together. With Frank Ruffino as VP of Governmental Affairs and Todd D'Braunstein as VP of Membership Development and Pam Robison as Secretary-Treasurer, we all made a good fit on the ACSS Executive Committee. We were a well-oiled machine. We got a lot of stuff done and progress was made. We didn't always agree on things but at the end of the day we came out as a team."

"I'm a people person. Just because I got elected to the Executive Committee does not mean that I am always going to sit with the Executive Committee. I talked to the whole membership. I would try to sit with different

people and talk to them. I would make sure I said "hi" to everybody and try to get a rapport. And I would ask them questions so that they would feel comfortable if something was going on they could come and talk to me. I didn't ignore people. And I think that made the difference when it came time for people to vote for me. I felt like I needed to reach out. I learned how to reach out from Frank Ruffino. Frank guided me on how to get involved. He encouraged me to take action and he taught me how to talk to political legislators. I was always humbled that people believed in me and trusted that I did a good job. Because it wasn't just me... it was all five of us [Executive Committee Members] that made decisions as a team. We couldn't have accomplished what we accomplished without all of us working together"

In the 9 years that Elnora served on the Executive Committee as Vice President, ACSS enhanced visibility of the organization to legislative and political leaders, improved working conditions for excluded employees by fighting to resolve salary compaction, and increased membership by several thousand new members through membership outreach programs.



ON THE HORIZON

Elnora's fourth term as Executive Vice President that started in July 2018 got cut unexpectedly short. In September 2018, Elnora announced to the Board that she was retiring so that she could spend time with her Godmother, a pastor named Dr. Leanora King who lives in Virginia. She was a second mother to Elnora. When Elnora was 15 years old, Leanora gave Elnora her first job as secretary in her clothing business. Leanora taught her how to be a wise business person and a leader. Elnora is thankful to have learned so many important skills and life lessons from her: "She has been an awesome support in my life. And so my journey into retirement will be to go back and spend time with her. That excites me. That is my future."

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

At Elnora's retirement party from CalSTRS, the CEO (that she sat down next to, years ago) reached out and gave her a phone call. He said, "We are going to miss you. You have been a great part of the team." He went on to say many other nice things about her. Elnora felt so appreciative that the CEO had taken the time to reach out





In this issue:

- **MEMBER SPOTLIGHT:
ACSS EXECUTIVE
VICE PRESIDENT -
ELNORA FRETWELL**
- **WE'RE MOVING!**


Q4 2018

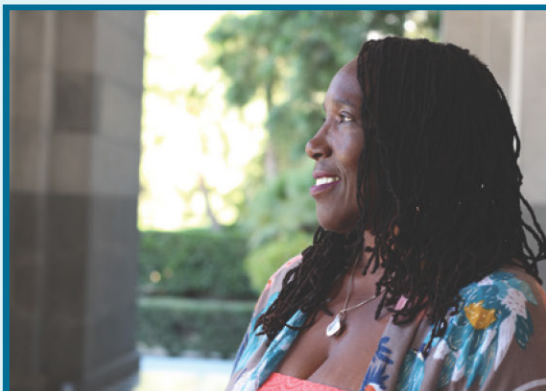
to her personally. She said, "It made me feel like everything that I went through at CalSTRS, I did it right. I didn't have to second guess myself."

ACSS President Frank Ruffino comments, "It has been a pleasure working with Elnora for many years. She always had something constructive to say, and always offered support and encouragement with an unflagging spirit. She has the strength to take risks and the courage to fight for what she believes in. We're going to miss her!"

At Elnora's last ACSS Board Meeting in September of 2018, before the meeting adjourned she made an announcement that she was retiring. Elnora made a short speech announcing to her fellow ACSS colleagues that she would be stepping down as Vice president and retiring from state service. At the end of her speech, everyone in the room stood up and applauded for her.

After the meeting adjourned, an ACSS member came up to her and said "You made me want to do

better. And seeing you up there I know I could be up there. Before I met you, I didn't know if I could do something like that but once I saw you up there and saw what you can do, that inspired me." Those words made Elnora feel like she made a difference. She was so humbled and was unaware that people were noticing her and paying attention to her positive actions. "By doing what's right and speaking my mind, I inspired someone else. I didn't know I was capable of that," Elnora said as tears well up in her eyes. Overwhelmed with emotion she spoke softly, "Wow, I made a difference. I am so happy that I belong to ACSS." 



WE'RE MOVING!

In February 2019, ACSS Headquarters will be moving to the Natomas Area of Sacramento. We will post our new address soon.



For more info, visit www.ACSS.org/Events

Contact ACSS Headquarters:
(800) 624-2137 | acss@ACSS.org