

MatchMaker Rates for 2003 Set

The PERA Board of Trustees set the following rates for MatchMaker for 2003. The new rates will be effective for payroll periods that have an ending date on or after January 1, 2003.

- 2 percent of pay for State and School members
- 2 percent of pay for Municipal members
- 6 percent of pay for Judges

Remember that all members are eligible to participate in the MatchMaker program—full-time, part-time, temporary, substitute, or seasonal—as long as they are contributing to an eligible defined contribution plan such as a 403(b), 457, or PERA's 401(k) Plan.

Paycheck stuffers in printed and electronic versions are available to advertise the new rates to your employees. Please call Katie Kaufmanis at 303-863-3814 or 1-800-759-7372 ext. 6114 if you would like some sent to you.

Purchasing Service Credit Update

It continues to be a record year for purchasing service credit. The Colorado PERA Board of Trustees will discuss raising the cost to purchase at their November 15th meeting, so please advise members that adequate notice will be given once the Board determines a new cost. All documentation of employment for which service is to be purchased must be received by PERA prior to the effective date of the increase in order for the purchase to be made at the current rate. Details will be posted on the PERA Web site and published in the upcoming *Member Report*. Encourage employees to attend a Benefit Information Meeting or Purchasing Service Credit meeting so that they can be informed on the process. The Colorado PERA Web site and the Purchasing Service Credit booklet are also excellent resources for information—www.copera.org.

Contribution Rates for 2003

Employer contribution rates will change for the Municipal Division on January 1, 2003. Remember that these new rates are effective for payroll periods that have an ending date on or after January 1, 2003.

Here are the new rates for 2003:

	January 1, 2002	January 1, 2003
Municipal	9.19%	9.60%
	July 1, 2002	July 1, 2003
State and School	10.04%	10.15%
State Troopers	12.74%	12.85%
Judicial	11.82%	12.66%

PERA Board of Trustees Sets Legislative Package for 2003

At their October meeting, the Board of Trustees established their legislative package for the upcoming session of the Colorado General Assembly. A pdf version of the legislative brochure is included in this e-mail.

Colorado PERA Welcomes New Employers

The following employers have affiliated with PERA since May of this year:

- Arkansas Valley Regional Library Service System
- Challenge to Excellence Charter School
- Colorado District Attorneys Council
- Indian Peaks Charter School
- Leadership Preparatory Academy Charter School
- Meeker Sanitation District

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Total Receipts for Purchased Service

January—September 2001	\$99,895,190
January—September 2002	\$247,754,272

Disability Benefits Program

Contributed by Sandy Johnson, M.Ed., CRC
Vocational Case Manager, Disability Program Administrator
Standard Insurance Company

When a person receiving a PERA disability can go back to work, everyone wins. The member recovers an important part of life—a job. The employer gains back a valued employee. And the community receives the full services the employer provides. Colorado PERA's Short Term Disability program was established to help members return to work whenever medically feasible, and The Standard's Colorado Public Team is here to facilitate this goal.

The employer can help in this process. Here are some tips to remember:

- 1. Encourage employees who become ill or injured to apply early for PERA's Short Term Disability program.** The sooner we can start medical and vocational case management, the easier it is to effect return to work. Employees do not need to terminate employment to qualify for Short Term Disability, but they do have to be unable to work full time.
- 2. Expect a call from the Vocational Case Manager at Standard.** We like to talk to the supervisor to learn what the job duties are, how the employee was doing before ceasing work, and whether light duty or accommodations are possible. We are happy to provide the employer with an Authorization to Obtain Information form signed by the PERA applicant.
- 3. Offer light duty or accommodations when feasible.** We provide return to work assistance such as short-term training and job modifications, and it's helpful to partner with the employer in this effort. We can suggest light duty options or modifications based on our past successes, so feel free to ask.

Standard Insurance Company has been the disability program administrator for Colorado PERA since January 1, 1999. The PERA disability program is two-tiered. The first tier provides short-term disability payments if members apply for benefits and are mentally or physically incapacitated from performing the essential functions of their job with reasonable accommodation as required by federal law. Members must also be unable to earn at least 75 percent of their pre-disability earnings in any other job they are able to perform based on education, training, and experience. If members are totally and permanently incapacitated from all regular and substantial gainful employment they may be eligible for PERA disability retirement benefits instead of short-term disability payments. PERA's program administrator, Standard Insurance, determines disability levels. Standard Insurance will

also determine which program members qualify for based on medical conditions.

It is not necessary that an applicant's employment be terminated for them to apply for short term disability. However, they cannot be working full-time or earning over 75 percent of their pre-disability earnings at the time that they submit their application.

All applicants should submit their application directly to PERA so that PERA can verify eligibility, after which, PERA submits the application to Standard Insurance. Upon Standard Insurance's receipt of the application from PERA, a team of disability specialists, a nurse case manager, a vocational case manager and a disability benefits analyst work together to make a determination about the applicant.

A nurse case manager contacts each applicant and a vocational case manager may contact the applicant and/or the employer. These phone interviews are designed to assist Standard Insurance in having a clear understanding of the applicant's medical and employment status. Often times the vocational case manager will contact both the benefits department and the applicant's direct supervisor for additional information.

PERACare Information E-mailed to Employers

Employers should have received a comprehensive package of information on the PERACare Program for affiliated employers via email in October. If you missed it, or we didn't have you on our distribution list, please contact Aubre Schneider at aschneider@copera.org.

The PERACare Health Benefits Program was extended to affiliated employers in 2001 and is adding more employers to its growing list. A total of 32 employers now provide PERACare to their employees.

Since June 1, 2002, Colorado PERA has welcomed the following employers to PERACare:

- Arickaree School District
- Cheraw School District
- Elbert County Charter School
- Elbert County Public Library
- La Veta School District
- Meeker School District
- Pueblo Library District
- Santa Fe Trail BOCES
- Stratton School District
- Swink School District



Selection of the PERACare program may occur at any time. For details about the coverage, to request a premium quote, or to set a meeting time for a PERA representative to talk to your organization's decision makers, contact Dennis Gatlin at 303-832-9550, ext. 6188.

PERA is Portable!

One of the criticisms that is often made of defined benefit (DB) plans like PERA is that they are not portable, and that workers who change jobs do not fare well when their employers have a DB retirement plan. A study of Colorado PERA by Buck Consultants found that not to be the case for members of Colorado PERA. Why? Because members, if they leave PERA-covered employment, can refund their contributions, plus 7 percent interest, and get a 50 percent match. If employees are eligible for retirement, their contributions, plus 7 percent interest are matched 100 percent. That makes Colorado PERA very portable!

Employer Handbook

An electronic version of the Colorado PERA Employer Handbook will be available soon. The new version will be available on our Web site later this year. It will be reformatted to provide simple access to information employers need about PERA and contain links to legislation and current forms. We will send you a notice when the electronic version is published.

Visit the Colorado PERA Web site. It includes past issues of *Topics* in the Employer Section.

www.copera.org

If It Doesn't Have the Colorado PERA Logo, Then It's Probably Not PERA

Over the past few months, we have received numerous calls and emails from employers, members, and retirees about companies out there using the PERA name, or something very similar, to encourage PERA members to come to meetings to learn about their PERA benefits. Remember that the best information about PERA benefits comes from PERA staff. We have five Field Education Representatives who can give employers and employees the best and most accurate information about PERA. They are:

Dennis Gatlin, Field Education Manager
Derek Dye, Field Education Representative
Patty Haas, Field Education Representative
Gordon Steuck, Field Education Representative
Aubre Schneider, Field Education Representative Trainee

Don't be fooled by private vendors who claim to be able to educate members about Colorado PERA!



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