Beginning in 1984, informal meetings among academic retirement organizations ultimately led to AROHE’s incorporation as a nonprofit in 2002 at the University of Southern California. AROHE’s original goals, “to provide resources and connections to increase retirees’ value to their colleges and universities, communities, and professions in the areas of philanthropy, advocacy on behalf of the institution, volunteerism, and institutional knowledge and commitment,” continue to guide our work to “transform retirement” for academic retirees and to help institutions of higher education to recognize, value, and tap the enormous reservoir of talents, connections, and expertise that retirees possess. Cheers to the next 20 years!

1984: Geraldine Ferraro was the first woman to run on a major political party’s presidential ticket, astronaut Bruce McCandless made the first untethered spacewalk, and the idea that would become AROHE began to take root. After a University of Southern California survey showed that very few colleges or universities had retirement organizations, USC spearheaded informal meetings with other universities in California, Oregon, and Washington that led to the first West Coast Conference on Retirement in Colleges and Universities in 1985 at USC. After several years of regular meetings, efforts stalled in 1990.

1998: The effort was revived in 1998 under the leadership of Dr. Paul Hadley, then director of the USC Emeriti Center, and his executive assistant, Harriet Servis. That year, a conference was held at sea aboard the Royal Caribbean’s cruise ship, Legend of the Seas. Following another informal conference in 2000 at San Diego State University, conversations about establishing a formal association to serve academic retirement organizations continued under the leadership of Dr. Hadley.

2001: Conversations about the organization’s formation continued, and at a 2001 meeting in North Carolina, the name Association of Retirement Organizations in Higher Education (AROHE) was chosen, and work began to incorporate the organization as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

2002: AROHE officially became a nonprofit with Dr. Hadley as its first president and held its inaugural conference at Indiana University in Bloomington. The conference brochure invited attendees to “help launch AROHE as a new international organization and help fulfill its mission: to provide a forum for the sharing and development of ideas, to learn about creative developments, to exchange ideas, and to be energized!” Elizabeth Redmon, who had succeeded Dr. Hadley as executive director of the USC Emeriti Center, became the first executive director for AROHE, establishing the organization’s policies and procedures and setting up its corporate office at USC, where it remains today.

2004: The Mars Rover landed, Facebook appeared on the scene for the first time, and the second AROHE conference was held in Nashville, Tennessee under the leadership of President Gene Bianchi from Emory University. Following the conference, AROHE launched a website, started the “AROHE News” newsletter, and published the “AROHE Start-Up Kit.” In 2005, Dr. Janette Brown succeeded Elizabeth Redmon at the USC Emeriti Center and became AROHE’s second executive director.

2006: The musical Mary Poppins closed after 2,619 performances, Twitter was launched, and AROHE held its third conference at Arizona State University under the direction of 2006-2007 President Shelley Glazer from UC Berkeley. In 2007, the first online survey of retirement organizations was completed, becoming a very valuable resource that highlighted successful practices among AROHE member organizations.
Michael Phelps won a record eight gold medals at the Beijing Olympics, the United Nations designated 2008 as the International Year of the Potato, and AROHE held its fourth conference at USC, coinciding with the USC Emeriti Center’s 30th anniversary. Janette Brown played a dual role that year, serving as both executive director and president for AROHE. The conference program was expanded to include individual presentations, panel discussions, demonstrations, and a member meeting.

The Isner-Mahut match at Wimbledon set the record for the longest tennis match at 11 hours/5 minutes, Apple introduced the iPad and sold 300,000 units on the first day, and AROHE held its fifth conference at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut under the leadership of 2009-2010 President Barry Culhane, Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT). The first pre-conference workshop, “Starting a Retirement Organization” was offered and RIT students redesigned the AROHE website.

Queen Elizabeth appeared to skydive into the opening ceremony of the summer Olympics in London, the Andy Warhol painting “Silver Car Crash” sold for a record $105M, and the sixth AROHE conference, under the leadership of 2011-2012 President Bobbie Lubker from the University of North Carolina (UNC) Chapel Hill, celebrated AROHE’s 10th anniversary. UNC Chapel Hill co-hosted with North Carolina Central University and North Carolina State University for a “Triangle of Adventures.”

AROHE held its seventh conference at the University of Minnesota under the leadership of 2013-2014 President Sue Barnes from the University of California, Davis. This conference was scheduled to follow the Big 10 Retirement Organization conference in Minneapolis to encourage Big 10 retiree organizations to also attend AROHE and to explore mutually beneficial ways to collaborate.

NASA’s Maven spacecraft reached Mars, Apple introduced Apple Pay, and AROHE’s eighth conference was held at the University of Washington under the direction of 2015-2016 President Patrick Cullinane from UC Berkeley. Also this year, AROHE began publishing AROHE Briefs as a new member resource. The Briefs are concise reports that identify programs and practices of interest to retiree organizations and individual faculty and staff retirees.

The world cheered as 18 boys and their coach were rescued after spending 18 days trapped in a cave in Thailand, Prince Harry married actress Meghan Markle, and AROHE held its ninth conference at Emory University under the direction of 2017-2018 President Caroline Kane from UC Berkeley. In 2019, Sue Barnes took the helm as AROHE’s executive director and the AROHE website and branding were redesigned with assistance from students/staff at Florida International University.

The world was gripped by the Coronavirus pandemic, resulting in major life disruptions. Like all retirement organizations, AROHE had to suddenly pivot to virtual programming. AROHE began offering online webinars to connect with AROHE members and to encourage members to share successful practices. The 2020 AROHE conference, originally planned to take place at Arizona State University under the direction of 2019-2020 President Trudy Fernandez from Florida International University, was postponed a year. The re-envisioned conference launched into cyberspace in 2021 to “Boldly Go” as a virtual event under the leadership of 2019-2020 President William Verdini from Arizona State University. Most AROHE board members, including President Verdini, extended their terms for an additional two years to provide consistency during the pandemic.

AROHE is well positioned to continue its mission and goals to transform retirement for academic retirees and to highlight the value that retired faculty and staff bring to their institutions of higher education.

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