



The ADVISOR

TEACHERS, EMPLOYEES, and JUDICIAL



Top Renaissance and Marriott Hotels Located In Alabama

From the banks of the Tennessee River to the shores of Mobile Bay, the top Marriott and Renaissance hotels are located in Alabama.

The Marriott Shoals Hotel & Spa was named the top Marriott hotel in North America for guest satisfaction in 2012 and has maintained the ranking in 2013. For meetings, three of the Top 10 Renaissance Hotels in the United States are located along the RTJ Golf Trail. This research is conducted by an outside firm for Marriott International and its Renaissance Hotels.

Here is how the Alabama hotels ranked nationally.

- #1 Marriott for Guest Satisfaction – Marriott Shoals Hotel & Spa**
- #1 Renaissance for Meetings – Battle House Renaissance Mobile Hotel & Spa**
- #6 Renaissance for Meetings – Renaissance Birmingham Ross Bridge Golf Resort & Spa**
- #8 Renaissance for Meetings – Renaissance Mobile Riverview Plaza Hotel**

“Twenty years ago before the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail opened, people would have laughed if they heard Marriott’s top golf was in Alabama,” said Larry Bowser, general manager of the Marriott Shoals. “No one would have guessed Alabama had the top spa, dining and luxurious atmosphere within Marriott. Today, we remain number one for overall guest satisfaction of the 330 Marriott Hotels.”

“Southern hospitality, a caring staff and attention to detail may be the secret to our success,” said Margo Gilbert, Battle House general manager. “We have a great team, strong ownership and a commitment to excellence. These honors speak loudly on how the Retirement Systems of Alabama is improving the image of our state and our reputation in the hospitality industry.” All four of these hotels are part of the Resort Collection on the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail. Information on the Resort Collection can be found at www.rtjresorts.com. ■

Protecting Your Retirement from Abuse

By Leura Canary

Our retirement system has a serious problem with retirees abusing Alabama law that requires the suspension of the retiree’s pension upon postretirement employment with RSA participating employers. Some retirees have been entering into sham independent contractor relationships with participating employers and taking the position that they are exempt from the postretirement pension suspension rules that would otherwise require the suspension of the retiree’s pension. Stated plainly, these violations are a form of pension fraud and cause a financial drain on your retirement system. This is not fair to the majority of law-abiding retirees.

Recently, the RSA has obtained clarification on these issues from the Attorney General’s Office and initiated a process to find out who is violating these provisions and to vigorously enforce the law. The RSA has notified all of the TRS and ERS participating employers and requested the names of retirees who perform work for them, either as an employee or pursuant to any direct or third-party contract. Employers must also provide information adequate for the RSA to determine whether the pension suspension rules apply and whether they are being violated by the retiree.

Alabama law allows an RSA retiree to work for a participating employer without suspension of his benefits if (1) the retiree is not employed in a permanent full-time capacity and (2) in 2013, earns \$23,000 or less per calendar year. Moreover, the pension suspension rules do not apply to retirees who work as true independent contractors, but only if the retiree’s work relationship meets the common law definition of an independent contractor, as codified in the IRS’s 20 factor test. Violators should be on notice: If your relationship with the participating employer is not that of a true independent contractor, and you are employed in a permanent full-time position or earn in excess of \$23,000 annually from that position, your pension will be suspended.

While the vast majority of retirees who return to work for participating employers do so in compliance with the “return to work” laws, the RSA must make every effort to stop those who are abusing the system. Please know that the RSA has undertaken this inquiry to make sure that it is protecting your system from abuse. ■

An Alabama Problem

By Erin Edgemon, al.com

Beverly Gilder watches the local news every morning, pausing when she hears a report of a Montgomery shooting. "I am watching to see if it is one of my people," the Montgomery County probation and parole officer says. Gilder is relieved when the report does not involve any of the 80 probationers and parolees she oversees. The former Army sergeant first class never deployed to a war zone, but her job now is its own type of battle.

The Alabama Board of Pardons and Paroles has applied Band-Aids to ensure oversight of 67,410 former inmates, officials say. Officers carrying an average caseload of 193 can spend less than 10 minutes per month with each offender. Drug testing, counseling, employment assistance and other services sometimes can't be delivered. And if probationers don't check in, there's little time to hunt them down.

Pardons and Paroles had 403 supervising officers in February 2007; now there are 350. Many officers, especially those in rural parts of the state, are left to supervise nearly 300 former inmates. Cynthia Dillard, executive director of Alabama Board of Pardons and Paroles, said national recommendations call for officers to

average seeing 60 to 75 people. With its limited resources, the board doesn't have the money to hire more officers, update equipment or add capacity to its 300-bed Thomasville transition center, Dillard said. She wants more money for staff and for new computer equipment, and got an increase from the Legislature for next year, but the bulk of money remains obligated to salary and benefits.

It is vital, though, that certain offenders are freed and supervised to make room in the overpopulated state prison system, she said. The state prison system has 11,982 more inmates than the system and its facilities are designed to hold, according to the Alabama Department of Corrections.

Fewer dollars and high caseloads mean some released offenders may not get supervision. Despite that, the number of repeat offenders in Alabama remains low, at 17 percent, while the national average is 37 percent. According to the agency's annual report, some 2,199 probationers re-offended in 2011-12 for either new offenses or technical violations of probation. The high caseload for probation officers, Cook says, means they do only the basics.

Officers briefly meet with the offenders who check in each month, but administrators know offenders are often not being monitored closely enough through counseling, home visits and drug testing to ensure they are staying out of trouble.

Pardons and Paroles by the numbers

- The average salary for a probation officer in the state of Alabama is \$41,566.
- The Alabama Legislature gives the Alabama Board of Pardons and Paroles less than \$2 per day for each client.
- The board's budget is \$40 million this year, and the vast majority of those funds pays salary and benefits.
- The Legislature has approved in next year's General Fund budget \$41.4 million.
- The Legislature wants the agency to add 50 beds to its Life Skills Involved by Freedom and Education (L.I.F.E.) Tech Transitional Center in Thomasville. The center, which currently has 300 beds, provides education, supervision and counseling to help those released from prison move into life on the outside. ■

Do you know today's Marion Military Institute?

By Col. David J. Mollahan, USMC (Ret), MMI President

You have probably heard of Marion Military Institute (MMI) in Marion, Alabama. Generations of Alabamians have passed through MMI's doors since its beginning as Howard College in 1842. Some of you may have a friend or relative who spent time at MMI. If so, then you probably know all there is to know about MMI, right? Then again, probably not.

The fact is there are many misperceptions about MMI shaped by out-of-date information. It is likely that the MMI you think you know is not the MMI of today. To begin with, there is no MMI high school. It was disestablished in 2006 when MMI joined the Alabama Community College System. The last high school class graduated in 2009.

Today, MMI is a state junior college that operates a lot like a U.S. Service Academy such as West Point and is

focused solely on higher education. MMI is coed and has been since 1972. In fact, women represent nearly 20% of MMI's Corps of Cadets. Also, there is no military obligation in attending MMI. In fact, 40% of MMI's cadets will pursue civilian careers once they transfer to their four-year university.

MMI is certainly proud of its military career opportunities. Most unique, and found only in the nation's five military junior colleges, is the Army's Early Commissioning Program, which commissions graduating cadets as officers in just two years. MMI's challenging one-year Service Academy Program places cadets into all five of the U.S. Service Academies.

MMI blends a superb academic program aimed at an Associate's Degree with a variety of co-curricular activities: NJCAA Division I athletics, a nationally-

recognized wrestling team, certified flight training, scuba diving, a drill team, military band, and more.

MMI is singularly unique because it combines higher education with an immersive leadership and character development experience. When cadets leave MMI, they leave not only better educated but better people, young leaders who will shape our country's future.

So, when Alabama families are making important decisions about college, perhaps MMI, today's MMI, will enter the conversation. ■

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NASRA Study

National Association of State Retirement Systems

Conclusion

On average, retirement programs remain a small part of state and local government spending, although required costs, benefit levels, funding levels, and funding adequacy vary widely. Over \$210 billion is distributed annually from these trusts to retirees and their beneficiaries, which serves as a source of economic

stimulus to virtually every city and town in the nation.

Changes to benefit levels and required employee contributions adopted by states and cities have been diverse, dependent in part on such factors as the legal authority to make changes to benefits or required employee contribution rates, and the plan's financial condition prior to

the 2008-09 market decline. Generally, states and cities with a history of paying their required pension contributions are in better condition and have needed more minor adjustments to benefits or financing arrangements compared to those with a history of not adequately making their contributions. ■

State and local government contributions to pensions as a percentage of all state and local government spending, by state, 2010

Alabama	2.85	Louisiana	3.31	Oklahoma	3.34
Alaska	2.25	Maine	2.77	Oregon	1.46
Arizona	2.42	Maryland	3.14	Pennsylvania	1.29
Arkansas	3.02	Massachusetts	3.36	Rhode Island	3.99
California	3.58	Michigan	2.32	South Carolina	2.24
Colorado	2.08	Minnesota	1.62	South Dakota	1.54
Connecticut	4.54	Mississippi	2.81	Tennessee	1.97
Delaware	1.99	Missouri	3.08	Texas	2.16
District of Columbia	1.33	Montana	2.40	Utah	2.76
Florida	2.58	Nebraska	1.60	Vermont	1.09
Georgia	2.14	Nevada ¹	2.84	Virginia	3.15
Hawaii	3.57	New Hampshire	2.47	Washington	1.40
Idaho	2.38	New Jersey	2.03	West Virginia	3.87
Illinois	4.75	New Mexico	2.77	Wisconsin	2.07
Indiana	2.82	New York	3.68	Wyoming	1.24
Iowa	1.73	North Carolina	0.99	United States	3.09
Kansas	2.03	North Dakota	1.20	U. S. Weighted Avg.	2.77
Kentucky	2.58	Ohio	2.85		

States where more than one-half of public employee payrolls are estimated to be outside of Social Security are italicized.

¹ In addition to being a non-Social Security state, one-half of Nevada PERS employers' contribution is attributable to a non-refundable pre-tax salary reduction to fund the employees' portion of the contribution.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

10 Unexpectedly Best States for Retirement

Source: Fox Business / Bankrate.com

What are the best states for retirees? The popular answer seems to be anywhere along the Sun Belt, where retiring Americans have flocked for generations in search of sunshine, swimming pools and year-round golf. Yet, if you consider other factors that are important for seniors, you'd find that some of the best spots are actually located farther north. Bankrate pored through a slew of key factors, including access to medical care, cost of living, local crime rates, state and local taxes—as well as climate.

Here is Bankrate's list of the 10 unexpectedly best states for retirement.

No. 10: North Dakota

No. 9: Nebraska

No. 8: Alabama

Home of the Robert Trent Jones Golf

Trail, Alabama boasts a trio of benefits that retirees may find alluring. It has some of the lowest local and state taxes in the nation. Its cost of living also is relatively low, especially for a Gulf Coast state. And its temperatures are among the warmest in the U.S.: Its average annual temperature of 63 degrees compares favorably to the national average, which is more than 10 degrees lower. However, Alabama has relatively high crime rates, with 4,026 property and violent crimes per 100,000 people (compared to the national average of 3,253). And access to medical care isn't as good as the national average.

No. 7: West Virginia

No. 6: Virginia

No. 5: Mississippi

No. 4: Kentucky

No. 3: South Dakota

No. 2: Louisiana

No. 1: Tennessee

That's right, Tennessee hits our No.1 spot. Its cost of living is the second lowest in the country, just behind Oklahoma, according to data collected from the Council for Community and Economic Research. And the Tax Foundation puts Tennessee's state and local tax burden as the third lowest in the nation. Tennessee also ranked among the best in the country for access to medical care, and its weather is warmer than average. All of those factors make Tennessee an excellent place for retirees, especially those on a tight budget and fixed income. There is still one main drawback, however. Tennessee's crime rate is among the worst in the U.S. ■

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Renaissance Ross Bridge – Hoover – \$109

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- August 1, 4-8, 11-15, 18-22, 25-29
- September 1-5, 8-12, 15, 18-19, 22-26, 29-30

Opelika Marriott – \$99

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- August 1, 4-15, 18-22, 25-29
- September 1-5, 8-11, 15-30

Prattville Marriott – \$89

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- September 1-9, 12-21, 23, 26-30

Renaissance Montgomery – \$109

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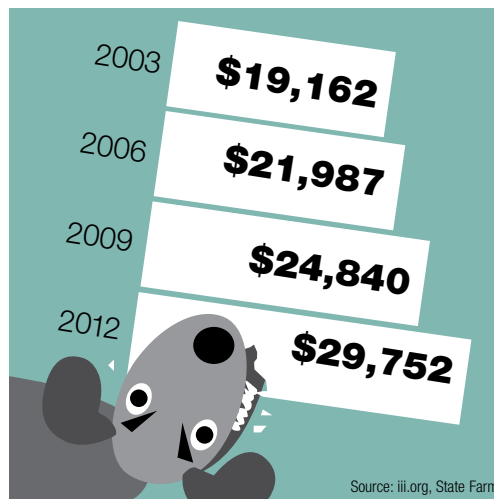
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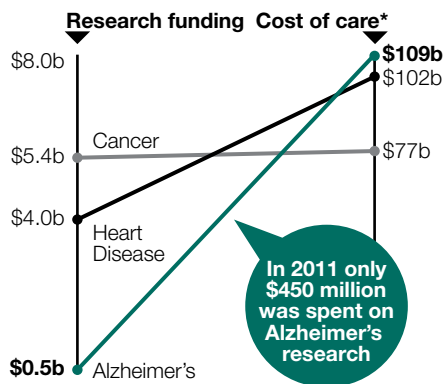
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Neglected Cause

Despite its high cost to society, Alzheimer's disease
gets less research funding than other illnesses



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