

## COMARA Newsletter — January 2010

The quarterly newsletters are mailed only to members without a working e-mail address in our database. If you have an e-mail address, please send it to [webmaster@comara.org](mailto:webmaster@comara.org) so we can send you the additional news that is only sent using email (about 20 per year).

Newsletters are planned to be published in January, May, and August. Send us your news and your photos by the first of the month preceding the issue date. Let us hear from you!

### ***Dues, Dues, Dues***

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You can check your dues status at the COMARA web page <http://comara.org>. After you sign in, your dues status is displayed at the top of the page. If you then click the “Edit My Profile” link at the left, you’ll find more detail. Paul Schrantz agreed to take over the membership duties from Joe Pelton so expect some friendly reminders from Paul.

Dues for 2010 are \$10. If your dues payment is not current, why not send a \$20 check for 2010 and 2011? Make checks payable to COMARA; put "Dues" on the memo line; and send to COMARA, PO Box 34594, Bethesda, MD 20827. The Board will consider a small increase in dues at their next meeting, but if you send your dues now, you can beat any increase.

### ***Events***

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#### **First Wednesday in December**

Despite the gloomy weather, about 50 COMSAT alums came out to celebrate the season at Roy’s Place in Gaithersburg, MD, on December 2, 2009. As he has done for the past 10 years, Ron Johnson hosted the event, meeting and greeting attendees and working with Mae, our long-time hostess at Roy’s, to be sure that a good time was had by all. Paul Schrantz offered a few words on behalf of COMARA, as attendees caught up on news of the past year. Take a look at the pictures. <http://www.comara.org/social/firstwed09/picDisplay.htm>

Brent Jacocks created a group room on Snapfish as an alternative display of the pictures. You will need a free account with Snapfish. View the “Roy’s Place 2009 Album” at <http://comarashots.snapfish.com/snapfish>

#### **DON’T FORGET TO RESERVE YOUR TICKETS: National Philharmonic Orchestra Concert at Strathmore on March 20, 2010**



In conjunction with the Intelsat Retirees Assn., COMARA has booked tickets for the All-Brahms concert on Saturday, March 20, at 8 pm. The program includes

BRAHMS Hungarian Dance No. 5  
BRAHMS Violin Concerto, with Chee-Yun as soloist  
BRAHMS Symphony No. 2

Free parking is available at the Grosvenor Metro Station Garage, fourth level. Tickets are \$39.20.

**Your check must be received by February 27, 2010.** Tickets will not be mailed; instead, they will be distributed near the Will Call windows the night of the concert, commencing at 6:45 p.m.

Requests for groups to be seated together may not be possible. The seats we have available this year are in the same section, but scattered.

There is a free pre-concert lecture about the program at 7 p.m. in the Education Center, immediately adjacent to Will Call.

Our group is eligible to use the VIP lounge, called the **Comcast Circles Lounge**, situated just off the rear orchestra section of the concert hall. It offers complementary hors d'oeuvres and a cash bar, and comfortable seating. The lounge opens at 7:15 p.m. before the concert, and will also be available to us at Intermission. It should be a great evening..

## **Joint COMARA-IRA Picnic at Glen Echo Park Tentatively Set for June 26, 2010**

The first COMARA-Intelsat Retirees Assn. Joint Family Picnic is scheduled for 11:30 am— 2:00 pm. This is a no-host event open to family and friends. Thus everyone needs to bring tablecloths, drinks, food, and condiments. There is a snack shop nearby if you wish to buy food and drinks on site. Sunday, June 27th, 2010, is the rain date. The calliope starts up at 12:00 noon (\$1 tickets). We hope this will be an easy way to see old friends and have a good time. Stay tuned. More details to come.

## **Return to *That's Amore* in Maryland**

The COMSAT Alumni Annual Reunion and Comara General membership meeting will return to Maryland in 2010. The Board is planning the next Comara Annual Meeting for the popular *That's Amore Restaurant* for a Sunday afternoon in September 2010. Details as to menu and date will be posted on the website, but we should have specifics by the time of the next newsletter.

## **Benefits**

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### **Notice: Prescription Drug Coverage**

For those currently receiving prescription drug coverage through the Lockheed Martin medical plans –

**ACTION ALERT** – Please consider calling, writing or e-mailing your two U.S. Senators about changes to the prescription drug coverage pending in Congress. Many COMSAT retirees are supporting the continuation of the \$600 annual tax credit per employee to employers who offer prescription drug benefits to their retirees, thereby preserving the system where some 7 million retirees have their drug costs covered by private plans at lower cost to the federal government than if they were all in Medicare Plan D. If you wish to write you can look up contact information here: [http://www.senate.gov/general/contact\\_information/senators.cfm](http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators.cfm).

**BACKGROUND** – An article by Tom Scully, former COMSAT Government Affairs staffer, in *The Wall Street Journal* on Friday, December 4, indicates that this “subsidy” is threatened by a possible amendment to the health care reform bill in the Senate. You will recall that Lockheed Martin sends all those participating in a retiree medical plan an annual letter stating that the prescription drug coverage offered by the company provides “comparable coverage” to the Medicare Plan D program. However, I am of the opinion that the Lockheed plan is substantially better than the Medicare Plan D plan, and well worth fighting for.

According to Scully, the federal government currently gives a \$600/yr/employee tax credit as an incentive for employers to cover retiree prescription drugs; and the federal government saves the estimated \$1,900/yr cost for those enrolling in Medicare Plan D. Those in Congress who see a potential savings in eliminating the tax credit to employers, amounting to \$5 billion over a decade, apparently fail to consider the second half of this equation! Remember also that there are about 7million of us! And so, when the full cost impact to the federal budget is calculated, it is very likely to have the opposite effect.

From our review, we believe such a provision is contained in the Senate version of the Bill; if so, there is a need for concern. Here for your information is one letter that has been drafted on this subject:

*Dear Senator \_\_\_\_\_:*

*With reference to the Health Care Reform Bill, I oppose any attempt to eliminate the \$600 per employee per year tax credit to employers who offer prescription drug service to their retirees through private plans, since shifting these seven million employees into Medicare Plan D will cost the federal treasury much more - an estimated \$1,900 per person per year. I am very satisfied with the drug coverage I now receive through Lockheed Martin in a private plan. Why change?*

*Sincerely,*

You may also want to copy your member of the House of Representatives, because if this health care reform is going forward, the two chambers will have to agree on a common text for the landmark legislation. Go here: <https://writerep.house.gov/writerep/welcome.shtml>

Should the tax credit nonetheless be eliminated, there are four consolations:

- 1) Most provisions of the Heath Care Reform bill will not go into effect until 2013 or 2014, so Lockheed Martin may continue the current coverage "for a while;"
- 2) If Lockheed does eventually eliminate prescription drug coverage for retirees, you will probably get a lower total premium for medical coverage since Lockheed's costs of providing the coverage will have been correspondingly reduced;
- 3) You WILL be eligible for Medicare Plan D, and will not have to pay a penalty for entering some years after the program was established, because Lockheed has been certifying "comparable coverage" to us each year; and
- 4) The Health Care Reform bill may improve some elements of the Medicare Plan D program, such as closing or narrowing the "doughnut hole" in the coverage.

But the combination of these is not at all likely to be as good as what we have now. Do what you can to preserve it. Call or write your Senators and Representatives NOW.

## **Benefits for 2010**

You may remember that I reported previously that there would be "basically no changes to plans currently being offered to post 65 retirees." (If you are an LM retiree under 65 years of age and have medical benefits from LM, you have already received information on the one plan that LM is sweeping all such retirees into for 2010.)

For the two plans I am able to review, the **Medicare Plus Catastrophic Plan 076**, and the **Medicare Direct Access 850**, this assessment appears to be quite accurate. The scorecard is "equal or better," but with a modest increase in premiums. Terrific!

Concerning the **Medicare Plus Catastrophic Plan 076**, the plan that many of us selected upon reaching Medicare age, the coverage, deductible, and co-pays for prescription drugs all remain unchanged with two exceptions. But these changes are actually positive: coverage for both mental health and substance abuse services as outpatients has been raised from 50% to 80% after satisfaction of the \$100/person/year deductible. Now, there is an increase of slightly more than \$10/month in the premiums for Lorraine and me, which represents about a 6% increase.. But I've seen plenty of articles asserting that the increase in medical costs is 10% or more over last year. So this is all good, in my view.

Note also, from the transmittal letter, than the agent for prescription drugs is changing from **Caremark** to **Medco**. I presume this will have little or no impact on us; indeed the costs for prescription drugs remain unchanged.

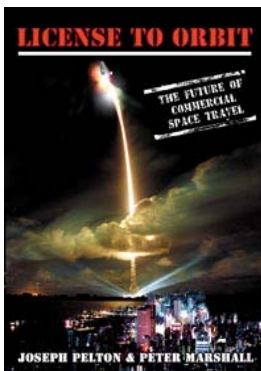
Aetna is again offering the **Medicare Direct Access 850 plan**, about which I wrote in fall 2008 when it was first offered. This appears to be a **Medicare Advantage** plan, about which much has been written recently. Similar to the analysis above, the coverage, deductible, and co-pays for prescription drugs all remain the same for 2010, with four exceptions. The 190-day lifetime ceiling on a variety of mental health and substance abuse areas now reads "no maximum." Since my prior analysis thus remains essentially valid, I refer you to it at the COMARA site, Benefits Section (you'll have to sign in), 2009 Benefits Package (in left margin).

While I did not select the Medicare Direct Access 850 plan last year, one of its more attractive features was the lack of any lifetime maximum on the amount the plan would pay. I reasoned that if you should need open heart surgery or some other very complex operation, your "lifetime costs" could rapidly head for the \$2 million maximum in many of your plans. Be advised, though, that removal of any lifetime coverage maximums is a common feature of most, possibly all, of the Health Care Reform Bills pending in Congress.

I am not able to analyze all the other plans since I don't have the coverage sheets from last year to "do the math" with and am not familiar with the "inner workings" of those other plans. You need to do your own homework on your plan. I hope you will find the result similarly encouraging. I'd like to hear from you on this. Drop me an e-mail: jackhannon(at)verizon.net.

Much could change if the Congress finally passes a Health Care Bill, and corporations then react to the changed situation. I don't think they could or would make changes during a program year, such as the 2010 program year. But the future would be open to perhaps considerable change. But for now things look very good. Thank you, Lockheed Martin!

*Jack Hannon*



### **News From Colleagues—Keeping In Touch**

Our President **Joe Pelton** has been busy on the writing front. He recently did an article on the *Early History of Satellite Communications* for the IEEE that will be posted on the Comara Web Site. **John Puente** is scheduled to do another similar piece on the history of the transition from analog to digital satellite communications. Joe has also published two books. License to Orbit about space planes and space tourism that is pictured at left. The other book is entitled "The Farthest Shore: A 21st

Century Guide to Space” and it was written and edited for the International Space University. This will be out in Feb. 2010.

**Pier Bargellini** writes, “Thankfully we are fine. After the winter (2008) spent as usual in Mexico we returned to Seattle on March 20 '09 . Everything OK here; we have made new friends and we like the city very much. Our granddaughter Sylvia graduated on June 7 and is now at the University of Arizona in Phoenix . During the last two weeks of June we visited our daughter Angela in Boston and our grand daughter Anna Jr in Wellfleet where we met many of our old friends . The biggest event of 2009 was the birth on April 19 of our first great grandson Lucas in Mexico.”

**Jeff Binckes** played a solo piano concert, his third in a series, at the Jewish Community Center, Rockville, on Monday, November 2, 2009. Jeff played and lectured on the works of Rachmaninoff's contemporary, Alexander Scriabin.



**Karen Ackermann** writes “I've been busy selling condos and doing a little traveling (in Ocean City, MD). Rick and I love to walk on the Boardwalk, go fishing, and play miniature golf. We have been on several cruises over the last couple of years with family and friends. I need to stay busy so I guess I'm not retiring again any time soon. We will stop and see Bill and Anne Windell on our way to the Keys in January. I have also kept in contact with Kay Flescher.”



**Drew Meulenberg** was in town recently for a brief visit with Tom Kirkendall, Paul Schrantz and Dick Arndt. Drew moved to Bangalore, in southern India (13°N latitude) after his retirement from COMSAT Labs Spacecraft Division. He considers Bangalore “air conditioned India,” but experiences daily power outages of about 2 hours. He is pursuing scientific interests in extraterrestrial exploration and colonization and recently presented a scientific paper at a conference in South Korea. Although landlocked now, he maintains an interest in sailing.

## ***In Memoriam***

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**John L. Martin, Jr.** passed away November 15, 2009, at age 89, in San Antonio, TX. According to his daughter, Teri Martin, until near the time of his death he had still been walking in the park twice a day and avidly watching shows about astronomy. He was buried with military honors on December 14, 2009, at Ft. Sam Houston National Cemetery in San Antonio.

**Colin Lee Bathgate** died on November 28, 2009. Colin worked as head of security for COMSAT Laboratories, and later Lockheed Martin, from 1981 until his retirement in 2004. According to *The Frederick News Post*, Colin treasured his family, but he also enjoyed Nascar, and he was an amazing cook; who baked and decorated large amounts of sugar cookies during the holidays. In addition to his wife, Colin left six children, Tami, Todd, Andrew, Noel, Colin Lee II and Gordie; eight grandchildren; his brother, Lawrence; and sister, Pamela Husik.

**Carol Allen Kasper**, daughter of Darlene and Bill Allen, died on August 23, 2009. Services were held at Christ Lutheran Church In Cedar Grove, MD. Carol worked at COMSAT Laboratories one summer. In lieu of flowers, the family requested donations to the Connecticut Hospice where she died.

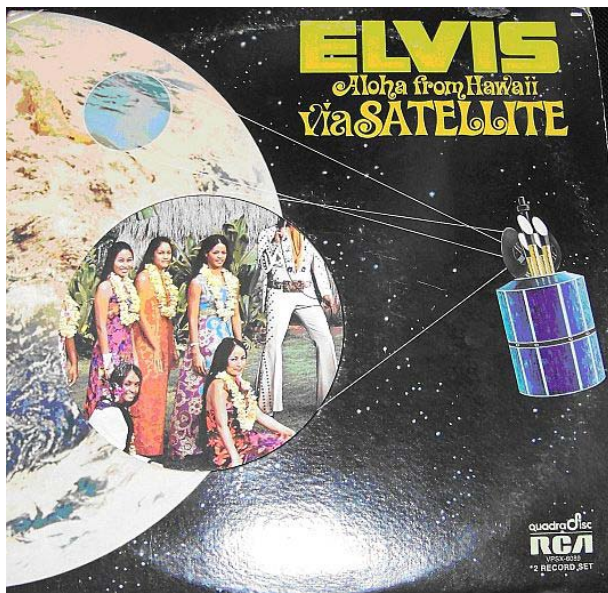
**Howard White.** Larry DeVore wrote (in December 2009), “I recently heard about Howard White's death from his daughter. Howard worked with the regulatory group in the General Counsel's office of COMSAT in the late 1960s. He left COMSAT to go to work for ITT where he became an executive vice-president and general counsel. After he retired from ITT he became a professor at St. John's Law School in New York. There were many positive and pleasant interactions with Howard both while he was at COMSAT and over the years after he left. He will be sorely missed by all of us who knew and admired him; he was an exceptional person.

## Legacy

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### Elvis: Aloha from Hawaii – Via Satellite

One of Paul Schrantz's Christmas gifts last year was a vintage copy of a Record Album “*Elvis: Aloha from Hawaii – Via Satellite*”. It was purchased at a flea market in Georgia by his son



Peter, who recognized the satellite image on the cover as one of Dad's satellites. Dad recognized it as Intelsat IV.

On the back cover, a statement reads “**Painting of Intelsat IV Satellite based on photo supplied by Communications Satellite Corporation**”. It also includes the statement “**Recorded Live at the Honolulu International Center, 12:30 AM, Sunday, January 14, 1973.**”

As the news stations covered the Elvis's 75th birthday celebration on January 8, Paul decided to check out the Web to see if there was any background on the album. To his amazement, there was lots of coverage including some amazing facts.

1. As noted it was recorded live, and the broadcast was beamed to approximately 40 countries, viewed live in Japan, Korea, and Australia, and on delayed broadcast to prime time in Europe.
2. The delayed broadcast in the United States took place on April 4, 1973, because of a conflict with a minor event called Super Bowl VII. (Unfortunately old Redskins fans will remember the defeat by the Miami Dolphins 14-7 on January 14, 1973.)
3. An article on ElvisPresley.com.au also indicates that the broadcast was viewed by 1 to 1.5 billion people around the world. The same article indicates that once shown in the US, it was viewed in more households than man's first walk on the moon. (not sure about that one!)

The success of the Intelsat IV satellite program was in part due to the dedication of the COMSAT employees who worked hand-in-hand with the Hughes Aircraft Staff to support the design, test and launch the satellites, and the dedicated COMSAT personnel who operated them once they were in orbit.

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aloha from Hawaii](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aloha_from_Hawaii) provides some additional details. For a bit of nostalgia, visit <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=97tAZiD-Ho>