

State Auto Financial CORP
Form DEF 14A
April 03, 2012

UNITED STATES
SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION

Washington, D.C. 20549

SCHEDULE 14A

**Proxy Statement Pursuant to Section 14(a) of the
Securities Exchange Act of 1934**

(Amendment No. __)

Filed by the Registrant Filed by a Party other than the Registrant

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Definitive Proxy Statement

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STATE AUTO FINANCIAL CORPORATION

(Name of Registrant as Specified In Its Charter)

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STATE AUTO FINANCIAL CORPORATION
NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING OF SHAREHOLDERS

To the Shareholders of

STATE AUTO FINANCIAL CORPORATION:

Notice is hereby given that the Annual Meeting of Shareholders of State Auto Financial Corporation (the Company or STFC) will be held at the Company's principal executive offices located at 518 East Broad Street, Columbus, Ohio, on May 4, 2012, at 10:00 a.m., local time, for the following purposes:

1. To elect three Class III directors, each to hold office for a three-year term and until a successor is elected and qualified;
2. To consider and vote upon a proposal to modify a material term of the Company's Leadership Bonus Plan and to reaffirm the material terms of such plan;
3. To consider and vote upon a proposal to modify a material term of the Company's Long-Term Incentive Plan and to reaffirm the material terms of such plan;
4. To ratify the selection of Ernst & Young LLP as the Company's independent registered public accounting firm for 2012;
5. To consider and vote upon, on a non-binding and advisory basis, the compensation of the Company's named executive officers as disclosed in the Proxy Statement for the 2012 Annual Meeting of Shareholders; and
6. To transact such other business as may properly come before the meeting or any adjournment thereof.

The close of business on March 9, 2012, has been fixed as the record date for the determination of shareholders entitled to notice of and to vote at the meeting and any adjournment thereof.

In order that your shares may be represented at this meeting and to assure a quorum, please indicate your voting instructions by telephone, via the Internet or by signing and returning the enclosed proxy promptly. Instructions for indicating your voting instructions by telephone or via the Internet are included on the enclosed proxy. A return addressed envelope, which requires no postage, is enclosed if you choose to submit your voting instructions by mail. In the event you are able to attend and wish to vote in person, at your request we will cancel your proxy.

By Order of the Board of Directors

JAMES A. YANO

Secretary

Dated: April 3, 2012

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STATE AUTO FINANCIAL CORPORATION

PROXY STATEMENT

GENERAL

This Proxy Statement is furnished in connection with the solicitation of proxies by the Board of Directors of State Auto Financial Corporation (the Company or STFC) to be used at its Annual Meeting of Shareholders to be held May 4, 2012 (the Annual Meeting). Shares represented by properly executed proxies will be voted at the Annual Meeting in accordance with the choices indicated on the proxy. A proxy may be revoked at any time, insofar as it has not been exercised, by delivery to the Company of a subsequently dated proxy or by giving notice of revocation to the Company in writing or in open meeting. A shareholder's presence at the Annual Meeting does not by itself revoke the proxy.

The mailing address of the principal executive offices of the Company is 518 East Broad Street, Columbus, Ohio 43215. The approximate date on which this Proxy Statement and the form of proxy are first being sent or given to shareholders is April 3, 2012.

This Proxy Statement, the form of proxy, and the Company's 2011 Annual Report to Shareholders are available at www.proxyvote.com.

PROXIES AND VOTING

The close of business on March 9, 2012 has been fixed as the record date for the determination of shareholders entitled to notice of and to vote at the Annual Meeting and any adjournment thereof. On the record date there were outstanding and entitled to vote 40,376,941 of the Company's common shares, without par value (the Common Shares). Each Common Share is entitled to one vote.

A quorum must be present at the Annual Meeting in order for the transaction of business to occur. A quorum is present if a majority of the outstanding Common Shares is present in person or by proxy at the Annual Meeting. Abstentions and broker non-votes will be considered as Common Shares present at the Annual Meeting for purposes of determining the presence of a quorum.

Broker non-votes and broker discretionary voting refer to the rules governing whether or not banks, brokers and other intermediaries (hereafter referred to collectively as brokers) may vote Common Shares held in street name for the benefit of their customers. In general, brokers have discretionary voting authority on behalf of their customers with respect to routine matters when they do not receive timely voting instructions from their customers. Brokers do not have discretionary voting authority on behalf of their customers with respect to non-routine matters, and a broker non-vote occurs when a broker does not receive voting instructions from its customer on a non-routine matter.

For Proposal One (election of Class III directors), the nominees receiving the highest number of votes will be elected as directors. Shareholders do not have the right to cumulate their votes in the election of directors. Abstentions will not be counted in determining the votes cast for the election of directors and will not have a positive or negative effect on the outcome of the election. Proposal One is considered a non-routine matter under the broker discretionary voting rules, and therefore, brokers may not vote uninstructed Common Shares in the

election of directors. Accordingly, if you hold your Common Shares in street name and you do not provide voting instructions to your broker as to how you want your Common Shares voted in the election of directors, no vote will be cast on your behalf. Therefore, it is important that you provide voting instructions to your broker if you want your vote to count in the election of directors.

For Proposal Two (approval of the modification of a material term of the Leadership Bonus Plan and reaffirmation of the material terms of such plan) and Proposal Three (approval of the modification of a material term of the Long-Term Incentive Plan and reaffirmation of the material terms of such plan), the vote required to approve these Proposals is the favorable vote of a majority of the outstanding Common Shares voted on such Proposals. Abstentions on either of these Proposals have the same effect as not voting or expressing a preference, as the case may be, and will not have a positive or negative effect on the outcome of these Proposals. Proposals Two and Three are considered non-routine matters, so if you do not instruct your broker as to how you want your Common Shares voted on these Proposals, no vote will be cast on your behalf. Therefore, it is important that you provide voting instructions to your broker if you want your vote to count regarding Proposals Two and Three.

For Proposal Four (ratification of the selection of Ernst & Young LLP as the Company's independent registered public accounting firm), the vote required to approve such Proposal is the favorable vote of a majority of the outstanding Common Shares that are voted on such Proposal. Abstentions will have the same effect as a vote against it. This Proposal is considered a routine matter, which means that if you hold your Common Shares in street name and do not provide, in a timely manner, voting instructions to your broker as to how you want your Common Shares voted on Proposal Four, your broker may vote your Common Shares on this Proposal at its discretion.

Proposal Five (vote on compensation to the Company's named executive officers as described in this Proxy Statement) is advisory only and therefore is not binding on our Board of Directors. However, the Compensation Committee may take into account the outcome of Proposal Five when considering future executive compensation arrangements. Abstentions on Proposal Five have the same effect as not voting or expressing a preference, as the case may be, and will not have a positive or negative effect on the outcome of this Proposal. Proposal Five is considered a non-routine matter, so if you do not instruct your broker as to how you want your Common Shares voted on this Proposal, no vote will be cast on your behalf.

All Common Shares represented by properly executed proxies will be voted at the Annual Meeting in accordance with the choices indicated on the proxy. If no choices are indicated on a proxy, the Common Shares represented by that proxy will be voted as follows: (1) for the election of the nominees listed in this Proxy Statement as Class III directors; (2) for the approval of the modification of a material term of the Leadership Bonus Plan and the reaffirmation of the material terms of such plan; (3) for the approval of the modification of a material term of the Long-Term Incentive Plan and the reaffirmation of the material terms of such plan; (4) for the ratification of the selection of Ernst & Young LLP as the Company's independent registered public accounting firm for 2012; and (5) for the approval of the compensation of the Company's named executive officers as disclosed in this Proxy Statement. Any proxy may be revoked at any time prior to its exercise by delivering to the Company a subsequently dated proxy or by giving notice of revocation to the Company in writing or in open meeting. A shareholder's presence at the Annual Meeting does not by itself revoke the proxy.

STATE AUTOMOBILE MUTUAL INSURANCE COMPANY (STATE AUTO MUTUAL), WHICH OWNS APPROXIMATELY 63% OF THE OUTSTANDING COMMON SHARES, HAS EXPRESSED AN INTENTION TO VOTE FOR THE ELECTION OF THE NOMINEES LISTED IN THIS PROXY STATEMENT AND IN FAVOR OF EACH OF PROPOSALS TWO, THREE, FOUR AND FIVE.

PROPOSAL ONE: ELECTION OF DIRECTORS

Nominees for Class III Directors

The number of directors currently is fixed at nine. Our Board of Directors is divided into three classes, Class I, Class II and Class III, with three directors in each Class. The term of office of directors in one Class expires annually at each annual meeting of shareholders at such time as their successors are elected and qualified. Directors in each Class are elected for three-year terms.

The term of office of the Class III directors expires concurrently with the holding of the Annual Meeting. Eileen A. Mallesch, Robert P. Restrepo, Jr., and Paul S. Williams, the three persons recommended by the Nominating and Governance Committee of our Board and each of whom is an incumbent Class III director, have been nominated for re-election as Class III directors at the Annual Meeting.

At the Annual Meeting, it is the intention of the persons named in the accompanying form of proxy, unless a contrary position is indicated on such proxy, to vote the proxy for the election of the three nominees named below as Class III directors, each to hold office until the 2015 annual meeting of shareholders and until a successor is elected and qualified. Each of the nominees has consented to being named in this Proxy Statement and to serve if elected. In the event that any nominee named below is unable to serve (which is not anticipated), the persons named in the proxy may vote it for another nominee of their choice.

Proxies cannot be voted at the Annual Meeting for a greater number of persons than the three nominees named in this Proxy Statement.

THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS UNANIMOUSLY RECOMMENDS A VOTE FOR THE ELECTION OF EACH OF THE THREE NOMINEES NAMED BELOW AS CLASS III DIRECTORS.

Backgrounds of Class III Director Nominees (Terms expiring in 2015)

Eileen A. Mallesch

Eileen A. Mallesch, 56, has been a director since August 2010. Ms. Mallesch served as Senior Vice President and Chief Financial Officer of Nationwide Property and Casualty Insurance Company from November 2005 to December 2009. She served as Senior Vice President and Chief Financial Officer of Genworth Life Insurance Company from April 2003 to November 2005. Prior to that, she was Vice President and Chief Financial Officer of General Electric Financial Employer Services Group from 2000 to 2003. Ms. Mallesch is also a director of Bob Evans Farms, Inc., a publicly traded restaurant and food products company.

Ms. Mallesch has been nominated for re-election as a director because of her extensive knowledge and experience in the areas of auditing, finance, enterprise risk management, taxation and mergers and acquisitions, in particular in the insurance industry. She also brings gender diversity to the Board.

Robert P. Restrepo, Jr.

Robert P. Restrepo, Jr., 61, has been a director since 2006, when he was appointed to the Board in connection with being retained as President and Chief Executive Officer of the Company. Mr. Restrepo has served as the Chairman of the Board, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Company, State Auto Property & Casualty Insurance Company (State Auto P&C), Milbank Insurance Company (Milbank) and Farmers Casualty Insurance Company (Farmers Casualty), each a wholly owned subsidiary of the Company, and of State Auto Mutual, since 2006.

Mr. Restrepo has been nominated for re-election as a director because of his extensive and valuable experience in operations, marketing, sales, and general management of a property and casualty insurance

company, including his unique knowledge and understanding of the Company's operations as a result of his more than five years in serving as the Company's President and Chief Executive Officer. He also has valuable experience in acquisitions, strategic planning and leadership development.

Paul S. Williams

Paul S. Williams, 52, has been a director since 2003. Mr. Williams has served as a Managing Director with Major, Lindsey & Africa, LLC, an attorney search consulting firm, since May 2005. He was an officer of Cardinal Health, Inc., a global provider of products and services to healthcare providers and manufacturers, for more than five years prior to that time, last serving as that company's Executive Vice President, Chief Legal Officer and Secretary. Mr. Williams is also a director of Bob Evans Farms, Inc., a publicly traded restaurant and food products company, and Compass Minerals International, Inc., a publicly traded producer and distributor of inorganic minerals.

Mr. Williams has been nominated for re-election as a director because of his experience as a lawyer and as the General Counsel of a publicly traded company and his knowledge in acquisitions and divestitures, legal and regulatory matters. Mr. Williams also brings racial diversity to the Board. In addition, Mr. Williams brings significant expertise in human resources, leadership development and executive compensation policy matters to our Board. He is a well-respected leader in the area of diversity, frequently speaking on diversity-related issues.

Backgrounds of Continuing Class I Directors (Terms expiring in 2013)

Robert E. Baker

Robert E. Baker, 65, has been a director since 2007. Mr. Baker has served as Executive Vice President of DHR International, Inc., an executive search firm, since June 2010. Mr. Baker was President of Puroast Coffee Inc., a maker of specialty coffee products, from October 2004 until accepting his current position. He served as Vice President of Corporate Marketing for ConAgra Foods, Inc., one of North America's largest packaged food companies, from April 1999 to October 2004. Mr. Baker was a director of CoolBrands International Inc., a publicly traded Canadian corporation focused on the marketing and selling of ice cream and frozen snack products, from February 2006 to November 2007. He was also a director of Natural Golf Corporation, a publicly traded company offering golf instruction and equipment, from January 2004 to July 2006.

Mr. Baker was last nominated in 2010 to serve as a director because of his experience as a senior executive of both publicly traded and privately held companies and his former experience as a director of publicly traded companies. He also brings racial and geographic diversity to the Board. In addition, Mr. Baker brings significant expertise in marketing, strategic planning and branding to the Board.

Thomas E. Markert

Thomas E. Markert, 54, has been a director since 2007. Mr. Markert has been an officer of the Business Solutions Division of Office Depot, Inc., a global supplier of office products and services, since May 2008, currently serving as that company's Chief Strategy and Innovation Officer. He served as the Chief Executive Officer of Ipsos Loyalty Worldwide, a division of Ipsos, a leading global provider of survey-based research, from May 2007 until accepting his current position. He also served as Global Chief Marketing and Client Service Officer of AC Nielsen, a leading global provider of marketing research and information services, from January 2004 until May 2007. For more than five years prior thereto, Mr. Markert held various executive positions within AC Nielsen.

Mr. Markert was last nominated in 2010 to serve as a director because of his experience as a senior executive of both publicly traded and privately held companies. He also brings geographic diversity to the Board. In addition, Mr. Markert brings significant expertise in marketing, branding and market research to the Board.

Alexander B. Trevor

Alexander B. Trevor, 67, has been a director since 2006. Mr. Trevor has served as President of Nuvocom Incorporated, a provider of patent litigation support services, since October 1996. He was a director of Applied Innovation Inc., a publicly traded provider of network management solutions for the communications industry, from 1997 to May 2007.

Mr. Trevor was last nominated in 2010 to serve as a director because of his experience as a senior executive and his former experience as a director of a publicly traded company. He also brings geographic diversity to the Board. In addition, Mr. Trevor brings expertise in information technology and computer systems to the Board.

Backgrounds of Continuing Class II Directors (Terms expiring in 2014)

David J. D. Antoni

David J. D. Antoni, 67, has been a director since 1995. Mr. D. Antoni served as Senior Vice President and Group Operating Officer for Ashland, Inc., a chemical, energy and transportation construction company, from March 1999 until his retirement in September 2004. He also served as President of APAC, Inc., a subsidiary of Ashland, Inc., from July 2003 until January 2004, and Senior Vice President of Ashland, Inc. and President, Ashland Chemical, a division of Ashland, Inc., from July 1988 until March 1999. Mr. D. Antoni is also a director of OMNOVA Solutions Inc., a publicly traded producer of decorative and functional surfaces, coatings and specialty chemicals, and Compass Minerals International, Inc., a publicly traded producer and distributor of inorganic minerals.

Mr. D. Antoni was last nominated in 2011 to serve as a director because of his experience as a senior executive of a publicly traded company, his experience as a director of publicly traded companies, and his knowledge with general management, acquisitions and divestitures. In addition, Mr. D. Antoni brings significant expertise in regulatory and environmental, health and safety matters to the Board.

David R. Meuse

David R. Meuse, 67, has been a director since 2006. Mr. Meuse has served as Principal of Stonehenge Financial Holdings, Inc., a privately held provider of financial and advisory resources, since September 1999. Prior to that time, Mr. Meuse held executive positions at various investment banking firms, including Banc One Capital Holdings Corporation and Meuse, Rinker, Chapman, Endres & Brooks. Mr. Meuse also serves on the board of directors of several privately held companies and non-profit organizations.

Mr. Meuse was last nominated in 2011 to serve as a director because of his experience as a senior executive, his experience as a director of publicly traded companies, and his knowledge with acquisitions and divestitures. In addition, Mr. Meuse brings significant expertise in investments, investment management, and financial market matters to the Board.

S. Elaine Roberts

S. Elaine Roberts, 59, has been a director since 2002. Ms. Roberts has served as President and Chief Executive Officer of the Columbus Regional Airport Authority, a public port authority which oversees the operations of Port Columbus International, Rickenbacker International and Bolton Field airports in Ohio, since January 2003. She served as Executive Director of the Columbus Airport Authority from December 2000 until accepting her current position.

Ms. Roberts was last nominated in 2011 to serve as a director because of her experience as a senior executive, in particular her senior management experience with the operation of a regulated entity. Ms. Roberts also has a legal background as an attorney, and she brings gender diversity to the Board.

Majority Voting Policy for Incumbent Directors

Our Board of Directors has adopted a majority voting policy for incumbent directors (the Majority Voting Policy) which is reflected in our Corporate Governance Guidelines. The Majority Voting Policy provides that if a nominee for director who is an incumbent director does not receive the vote of at least the majority of the votes cast at any meeting for the election of directors at which a quorum is present, and no successor has been elected at such meeting, then that incumbent director will promptly tender his or her resignation to the Board of Directors. For purposes of the Majority Voting Policy, a majority of votes cast means that the number of Common Shares voted for a director's election exceeds 50% of the number of votes cast with respect to that director's election or, in the case where the number of nominees exceeds the number of directors to be elected, cast with respect to election of directors generally. Votes cast (i) include votes to withhold authority in each case, and (ii) exclude abstentions with respect to that director's election or, in the case where the number of nominees exceeds the number of directors to be elected, abstentions with respect to election of directors generally.

The Nominating and Governance Committee will make a recommendation to our Board of Directors as to whether to accept or reject the tendered resignation, or whether other action should be taken. Our Board of Directors will act on the tendered resignation, taking into account the Nominating and Governance Committee's recommendation, and publicly disclose (by a press release, a filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission or other broadly disseminated means of communication) its decision regarding the tendered resignation and the rationale behind the decision within 90 days from the date of the certification of the election results. The Nominating and Governance Committee, in making its recommendation, and our Board of Directors, in making its decision, may each consider any factors or other information that the Nominating and Governance Committee or Board, as the case may be, considers appropriate and relevant. The director who tenders his or her resignation will not participate in the recommendation of the Nominating and Governance Committee or the decision of our Board of Directors with respect to his or her resignation. If such incumbent director's resignation is not accepted by our Board of Directors, such director will continue to serve until the next annual meeting and until his or her successor is duly elected, or his or her earlier resignation or removal. If a director's resignation is accepted by our Board of Directors, then our Board of Directors, in its sole discretion, may fill any resulting vacancy pursuant to the provisions of our Code of Regulations.

Beneficial Ownership Information for Directors and Named Executive Officers

The following table sets forth information with respect to Common Shares beneficially owned by directors, director nominees and our Named Executive Officers or NEOs (those persons listed in the Summary Compensation Table on page 54 of this Proxy Statement) as of March 9, 2012:

Name	Common Shares Beneficially Owned(1)	Stock Options(2)	Restricted Share Units(3)	Total Beneficial Ownership of Common Shares and RSUs	Percent of Class
Robert E. Baker	1,800	0	11,313	13,113	*
David J. D. Antoni	63,935	9,900	14,604	88,439	*
Eileen A. Mallesch	3,800	0	5,227	9,027	*
Thomas E. Markert	500	0	11,313	11,813	*
David R. Meuse	55,000	0	12,951	67,951	*
Robert P. Restrepo, Jr.	89,675(4)(5)(6)	208,898	N/A	298,573	*
S. Elaine Roberts	1,000	7,400	14,604	23,004	*
Alexander B. Trevor	500	0	12,951	13,451	*
Paul S. Williams	325	4,200	14,604	19,129	*
Steven E. English	7,389	68,029	N/A	75,418	*
Mark A. Blackburn	44,581(7)	158,622	N/A	203,203	*
Jessica E. Buss	731	4,370	N/A	5,101	*
Clyde H. Fitch	11,961	57,563	N/A	69,524	*
James A. Yano	7,259	33,347	N/A	40,606	*
Directors and Executive Officers, as a group (19 persons)	314,159	706,578		1,020,737(8)	2.5%(8)