

## Robinson receives OPSEU's humanitarian honour

**R**osa Parks. Marie Curie. Madeleine Albright. Jane Addams. Louise Arbour. Emily Murphy. This short list represents a small sampling of the most influential women in history. The list is incomplete without adding the name of Ireland's Mary Robinson.

Ms. Robinson, the first woman President of Ireland (1990 – 1997) and formerly the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (1997 – 2002), began her career as a barrister. In her twenties, she became the youngest Reid Professor of Law at Trinity College. Ms. Robinson used her legal expertise and her passion to fight for social change in some of the highest courts in Ireland and Europe. This, coupled with her political activism, saw her rise to national attention.

In 1990, Ms. Robinson became the seventh (and first woman) President of Ireland. Her political views and moral values were liberal compared to the previous conservative governments. By the time of her presidency, she had attained valuable political experience and knowledge and had proven herself as an intellectual leader. These attributes helped her lead Ireland into a new era. Her popularity with the people grew as did the respect from her opposition.

Ms. Robinson's humanitarian convictions were proven during the 1992 Somalia crisis and the 1994 Rwanda genocide. She was the first head of state world-wide to visit the ravaged countries following the disturbing events.

Today, she continues her efforts to break down barriers. Human rights are always at the forefront



of her many projects. Ms. Robinson is the founder and President of the Ethical Globalization Initiative. The organization focuses on setting global standards and practices for human rights and promoting "good governance" for developing countries.

A member of The Elders, Ms. Robinson joins others, "as an independent group of eminent global leaders, brought together by Nelson Mandela, who offer their collective influence and experience to support peace building, help address major causes of human suffering and promote the shared interests of humanity."

Ms. Robinson holds honorary doctorates at more than 40 prestigious universities and has received numerous awards from across the globe for her humanitarian works.

It is our honour to present Ms. Robinson with this year's Stanley Knowles Award.

## Honourary Lifetime Membership Award

# Charles Darrow

Charles Darrow began his years as an activist prior to 1960, as President of the United Steel Workers in Kirkland Lake. He began working for the Oxford Regional Centre in Woodstock in 1960.

By 1967, Brother Darrow was elected Branch President of the Civil Service Association of Ontario (CSAO). In 1968, he was elected to the CSAO Board of Directors.

Brother Darrow was elected as CSAO President in 1975 and it was under his presidency that the CSAO became the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU).

Below are excerpts from the eulogy given by Brother James Tait for Brother Darrow, at his funeral in 1982.

*"I have been asked to say a few words about our friend and brother, Charlie Darrow.*



*It's not often that you or I have the privilege of crossing paths with people such as Charlie.*

*He was special to us who worked and fought with him because of the kindred spirit we shared towards the union in which he believed and contributed to, more than most.*

*Charlie, Chuck, Chas, yes, and even The Puck, we all had names for him and he knew them all.*

*Charlie was never anything else other than a working man.*

*Sometimes, we working people are referred to as common people. But Charlie proved to all who had faith in him that the common man can rise to uncommon heights.*

*He was indeed an extraordinary man who always kept in touch with the ordinary people.*

*He never forgot his true beginnings and relationships with the working people he represented for the better part of his life."*

# Jim Tait

Known as one of the "Four Horsemen" of OPSEU, Brother James "Jim" Tait was one of four CSAO members who shared the common vision that there was a need for real membership input as to who was leader of their organization. Together with Charlie Darrow, Ron Haggett and Vic Williams, Brother Tait was instrumental in turning CSAO into a member-run union, controlled by elected members. CSAO became OPSEU in 1975.

Brother Tait's working years has spanned a variety of careers, from a deckhand on a trawler on the waters near Iceland to working for various brokerage firms to working at the Ministry of Health, where he first joined the CSAO. Brother Tait became an OPSEU Staff Representative in early 1978.

Brother Tait was known for his ability to address groups, promote solidarity and have

members answer his call to action. His skills were put to the test in 1989. Brother Tait forged his relationship with

Corrections during the Hamilton-Wentworth Detention Centre fiasco that year. The overcrowding situation was out of control and the officers needed to take back the jail. Brother Tait was dispatched to the institution to ensure the safety of the officers and to assist in any way he could.

Brother Tait remained the "last man standing." He stayed until the officers had taken back control and didn't leave until after the last officer had left the building safely.



## Honourary Lifetime Membership Award

# George Cadieux

George Cadieux joined OPSEU in 1976 and has been an activist since day one. He began his union career as a member of the Ontario Public Service (OPS) until the closure in 1999 of Prince Edward Heights, an institution in Picton for developmentally disabled adults, where Brother Cadieux worked. Following the closure, Brother Cadieux became a member of the Broader Public Service (BPS), until his retirement.

Brother Cadieux is well respected within his local and has held various Local Executive

Committee (LEC) positions. He is known for his dedication, organization skills, communication skills and his commitment to motivating and educating members.

Though retired, Brother Cadieux continues to be available for his former local (Local 448) and OPSEU members, and actively volunteers within his community when he's not spending time with his children and grandchildren.

## Health and Safety Award – Individual

# Noeline Ah-hone

Noeline Ah-hone, Local 502, is the driving force behind the creation of an effective Joint Health and Safety Committee (JHSC) at her workplace at 900 Bay Street, Toronto. She supports and educates her members, demonstrates exceptional professionalism and possesses strong skills and knowledge of Health and Safety issues. Sister Ah-hone hosts frequent meetings, keeping her members informed and empowered.

Sister Ah-hone, has proven herself a force to be reckoned with, educating her members on “how to handle management” at the table with an employer that refuses to take employee concerns seriously.

Members of Local 502 now exclaim that their “JHSC kicks butt,” thanks to Sister Ah-hone.



## Leah Casselman Award – Local

# Local 439

The workers and residents of the Brockville Mental Health Center have been under repeated attacks by the provincial government since 1999. Plans to privatize and/or close the facility altogether would have a completely devastating affect on the lives of the people who work there and the clients who rely on their services.

Members of Local 439 have worked tirelessly against the attacks and managed to stave off the original plans for closure. However, a more recent announcement by the employer to phase out the Centre over the next 10 years has created a new urgency for this local to educate the members, the clients and the community.

They have done exactly that. With creative ideas to fight the employer and the bid to close the facilities, Local 439 has attracted media

attention, the support of the community and the support of key MPPs. Not only have their efforts brought awareness about the planned closure, it has raised awareness of mental illness and mental health issues as well.

A Facebook group, town meetings, rallies, following through with grievances, arbitration, and even a posting a “job wanted” advertisement in the *Brockville Recorder & Times* for a new hospital CEO, have been many of the ways they have brought attention to their situation and shown the employer they mean business.

Local 439 members continue their fight against an employer that puts profits before people. They are a true representation of activism and caring for their members, their clients and their community.

## Leah Casselman Award – Individual

# Helena Whale

In the summer of 2009, Helena Whale (Local 310), a student working for the Ministry of Natural Resources, exemplified what one voice can do to make a change. She spearheaded a campaign against the McGuinty government about discrimination pay issues for students working in the Ontario Public Service (OPS). Specifically, her employer was trying to shirk their responsibilities to pay student holiday pay.

Sister Whale mobilized students from her park to bring awareness of the situation. Through her determination, communication and hard work, the campaign spread throughout all provincial parks in her

Region, then around Ontario.

A true inspiration, Sister Whale recognized that something was wrong and had to be done, regardless if she is a young worker and a student showing the true heart of an activist. OPSEU was

there to support her and rally behind students across the province for fairness.

As Sister Whale may not find her calling within public service, we wish her well with her future endeavours and know that, wherever she works, she will continue the fight for fairness for all workers.

More than 3,000 students work within the OPS during the summer months.



## Human Rights – Individual

# Yhony Munoz

Yhony Munoz, Local 256, found his voice fighting for human rights and equity at the grassroots in the country of his birth, Colombia, one of the most dangerous countries for a labour activist. Though he experienced situations that were unfathomable to most and despite the dangers he faced, Brother Munoz stayed strong and maintained his commitment to human rights struggles.

As an activist of OPSEU, Brother Munoz brings



awareness to human rights issues in other parts of the world. He has involved himself in various campaigns against major corporations responsible for human rights atrocities and continues to fight for equity worldwide. Brother Munoz returned to Colombia as a member of the OPSEU Solidarity Tour in August 2009.

Today, Brother Munoz continues to make a significant advancement for human rights, not only here in Canada but abroad, as well.

## Rainford Jackson Award

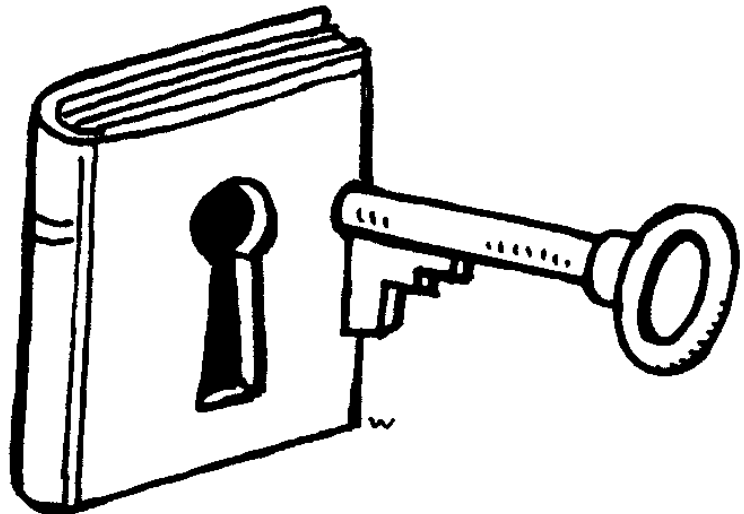
# Speakers School, Thunder Bay

The Speakers School in Thunder Bay is a joint effort operated by the Thunder Bay District Injured Workers Support Group, Kinna Awaya Legal Clinic and the Thunder Bay Social Planning Council. Beyond learning skills to become better public speakers, it gives a voice and confidence to those that are marginalized in society.

Graduates of the 14-week course deliver five minute speeches that range in topic. One participant at graduation is quoted as saying, “It is one thing to hear about the challenges faced by those who live on the edges of our society but it is quite another to hear from the people who actually live that life; to hear from those who best know what life’s challenges are and what the best solutions are to improve their lives.”

The Speakers School educates and empowers those that may not otherwise have a voice, or the confidence, to use it.

OPSEU assisted in the first year of funding. Steve Manis, of the Injured Workers Support Group says, “This school would not be possible, and the two years of funding from Trillium Funding would be have been obtained, were it not for OPSEU.”



# Heralding the end of an era

This year marks the 30th anniversary of convention at the Sheraton Centre Toronto. With the exception of two years, OPSEU has held its annual convention in the downtown Toronto hotel since 1980. In the early years, an average of 600 delegates, alternates, observers, guests and staff attended convention. Today, the number is a staggering 1,400 plus.

Though a great sign that OPSEU is thriving, the organization has outgrown the host hotel. Every guest room of the hotel is occupied.

Every available meeting room is used. Due to the numbers, the observers area on the floor has decreased in size and an overflow room (with screen and sound) is now required. Maneuverability around the tables on convention floor has become difficult because of the cramped quarters.

Convention is about the business of the organization, a celebration of accomplishments and an opportunity to refocus as a whole. However, there are certain extra-curricular activities that have become a part of the convention culture at the Sheraton and are just as important as the business: the fourth-floor gauntlet

of the regionally-hosted hospitality suites; the indoor/outdoor pool; the food courts and eating “street meat” in Nathan Philips Square during lunch break; rallying at Old City Hall; and seeing the Toronto Blue Jays play baseball. These extra activities allow for networking and re-energizing of OPSEU

activists, building teamwork and a community of support within the organization.

Though the end of an era has come, a new era begins in 2011 when the OPSEU Convention moves to its new location at the Toronto Convention Centre. The floor space has 50 per cent more seating



*Overhead view of Convention floor,  
2009 OPSEU Annual Convention, Sheraton Center Toronto*

capacity, both sides of the observer areas will be back on Convention floor, accommodation issues that have been a problem in previous years should be resolved and there are more meetings rooms available for committees.

Excited about the new facilities and that the move will be seamless, Audrey Williams, OPSEU Convention Coordinator, says, “I’m looking forward to a smooth transition, more space, the ability to accommodate more people and to maintain the culture of convention in our new convention home.”

Brought to you by **IN SOLIDARITY.**

This is the seventeenth year that the editorial committee of **In Solidarity** has produced the daily updates.. We will provide a record of Convention events and happenings.

**Who we are:** Laurie Sabourin, Local 368, Karrie Ouchas, Local 340, Felicia Fahey, Local 681, Tim King, Local 736 and Riley Dawe, Local 596. Ex-officio members are: James Tocker, Executive Board Liaison and Don Ford, OPSEU Communications.