

OPSEU



SEFPO

Our Ontario

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The Ontario Workers Arts and Heritage Centre lives in a national historic site and an Ontario Heritage site, and it has the plaques to prove it. (Page 4)



When crisis hit Walkerton, OPSEU members were there to help, among them Carl Grimstead of the Ontario Clean Water Agency and Bruce Hawkins from the Ministry of the Environment (Page 12)



Stephanie Blake believes the Network for Better Contracts will mean stronger agreements for all members (Page 9)

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Changes in law can erode your rights



By Leah Casselman

Our experience with the Harris Tories has taught us hard truths:

1. They don't like unions. That's why they legalized scabs and made it harder to join a union.
2. They don't respect their own employees. That's why they removed successor rights from the Ontario Public Service and forced a strike in 1996.
3. They don't care who they hurt when they destroy public services. That's why people died in Walkerton.
4. They don't respect democracy. That's why they changed the rules of the legislature so they can rush an idea into law in only four days.

Now they plan huge changes to the Employment Standards Act (ESA) and other labour laws.

These anti-worker changes would hurt many of our members and have a long-term impact on our labour relations climate.

We have to be ready.

Most clauses in most OPSEU contracts are significantly better than the Employment Standards Act, but that can't make us complacent. Most contracts also say that some benefit or other will be in accordance with the ESA. Maybe it's severance, maybe it's maternity leave, or maybe it's overtime. If your contract refers to the ESA, and the ESA is changed – so is your contract.

The ESA is a floor. If the floor drops, it is harder to make gains.

On another front, the Tories complain about “red tape” which they propose to “fix” by denying

unions the right to take public stands. That would have harmed our ability to promote issues like water safety at the Walkerton Inquiry (See Page 12). It would make us a less effective union.

Another idea the Tories have floated would let people grab all the advantages of union membership without paying dues. For 50 years in Canada, everyone covered by a union contract has paid dues, even though they might not want to join the union. This is fair. Everyone gets the pay, vacations, benefits and protection of the union; everyone should pay their share.

The Tories say “free riders” enhance workplace democracy. That's a sham. Our vision of democracy gives everyone the right to participate with equal voice and vote. It respects the will of the majority.

A chain is only as strong as its weakest link. If we allow the Ontario government to weaken any of the links in the network that protects workers, we open the door to weaker language in our own contracts the next time we go to the bargaining table.

Please watch for events in the Ontario Federation of Labour campaign. They will be posted on the OPSEU web page. When you get a call to attend a meeting or take an action, be there. We have to act before the government moves. We can't afford to sit this one out.

Leah Casselman, President

Jim Spence: retired supervisor of staff reps

Jim Spence, whose active involvement in OPSEU included the transition from the Civil Service Association of Ontario, died July 27.

Spence served on the union's board before moving to a full-time job as a staff representative.

"He was part of the transition from CSAO to OPSEU," said chief negotiator Andy Todd. "He was one of those who wanted to move to a stronger union model, and brought effective leadership to that endeavour."



Bob Pick: medical division activist

Bob Pick, former president of Local 235 and an active member of the Medical Division, died this summer. He had been diagnosed with a brain tumour about two months earlier.

Bob was on the central hospital bargaining team between 1985 and 1991, where his insight was an asset for thousands of OPSEU members who work in technical jobs in hospitals.

"He was devoted to his family, his profession as a medical laboratory technologist and his union," said staff negotiator Janet Wright.

Paul Hatala: former Region 6 EBM

Paul Hatala, a retiree and former member of the OPSEU Executive Board from Region 6 died Aug. 28. Paul was a long-time president of Local 622 and served on the ministry employee relations team for the Ministry of Transportation.

NUPGE grows by 6,500

The National Union of Public and General Employees has just grown by 6,500 members.

The New Brunswick Public Employees Association, OPSEU's counterpart in N.B., has voted to affiliate with the national union.

The decision brings NUPGE's total membership to more than 325,000 members, making it the second largest public sector union in Canada.



Region 6 vice president Bill Kuehnbaum presents Jennifer Breault with NUPGE's \$1,000 Terry Fox scholarship. Jennifer, daughter of Local 618's Cindy Loach, is attending Laurentian University.

Youthful group makes big gains

Part-time staff at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto ratified a first contract Aug. 9 more than doubling the pay for some.

The 162 workers, members of Local 543, also won sick leave and more control over scheduling, a key issue for part-time workers.

"It's a wonderful feeling that a group of young people, mostly students, could have a landmark accomplishment," bargaining team chair Patrick Simon told the *Toronto Star*. Simon and co-workers Frances Giampapa, Liz McArthur and Claire Mummé worked with OPSEU negotiator Rob Field, staff representative Mary Ellen Cassey, and pay equity specialist Janet Wright to wrap up the deal.

"By the end of the contract, they will have wage parity with full-time staff [also part of Local 543]," said Field.

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1999 OPS bargaining is over

The 1999 round of OPS talks is finally over, with new class standards and salaries for 12 designated inspector/investigator classes.

Implementation is retroactive to Jan. 1, 1999.

During OPS bargaining, the employer agreed to review the 12 classes and set up a new pay framework. The revisions, completed in June, were the final step in the bargaining process.

Pension trustee vacancies

OPSEU will have openings in January for a trustee for the OPSEU pension plan and an alternate for the Hospitals of Ontario Pension Plan. Candidates must be active members of the plan concerned.

Details and deadlines are available from the Membership Benefits Department at OPSEU, 100 Lesmill Road, Toronto, Ontario M3B 3P8 or on the website www.opseu.org.

Local 500 signs first contract

Negotiators for Local 500, the Centre for Addition and Mental Health in Toronto, reached a tentative agreement for a first contract June 2. The centre was created by combining the Clarke Institute for Psychiatry, Queen Street Mental Health Centre, Donwoods Institute and Addiction Research Foundation.

The nearly 1,600 employees had been covered by six different collective agreements. There were also two non-union groups.

All staff receive a retroactive payment equal to 8.09 per cent of their December, 1998, wages to cover the period from December, 1998 to March 31, 2001. At that point a new wage and classification system narrows 270 classifications to about 70 in 31 pay bands. Some wages increase by as much as 30 per cent. Anyone whose pay declines is red circled.

The Centre joins the OPSEU Benefit Trust. Members already in the OPSEU Pension Trust will stay there. New hires and others go into the Hospitals of Ontario Pension Plan.

The contract also covers time off for union business, and good job security language.

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FLY THE UNION FLAG

There's more than one way to get involved in your union.

You can wrap yourself into a cozy sweatshirt, don a snappy denim shirt, cover your ears with polar fleece, shade your eyes with a ball cap and add a gold lapel pin.

Literally or figuratively, OPSEU has a wide range of items to let you fly the OPSEU flag in style and comfort.

There's the flag itself (Forward Together) at \$65 plus \$15 for poles.

Shirts and jackets range from \$10 (for a navy t-shirt with the logo) to \$45 (the denim from small to extra extra large).

Why do we have "OPSEU Stuff?"

"We're proud of our union," said President Leah Casselman. "Wearing a shirt with our



Mary-Anne Di Adamo, campaigns department, models "OPSEU stuff."

Steve Daynes photos

logo is one way of expressing that pride."

It can also be a way to meet people with whom you share a common bond – your union. If you're standing in a supermarket line behind someone in the nifty red zip-neck sweatshirt with the OPSEU logo, you've got something to talk about besides the slowness of the line, the price of potatoes and the weather.

For stewards and activists, union clothing, mouse pads and coffee mugs say that here is someone willing to talk about union issues.

The range of OPSEU stuff evolves. New items are added, older ones dropped. One of the latest additions is a navy windbreaker. You can check out (and order) the current "stuff" on the website

(www.opseu.org). Or

you can get in touch with Mary-Anne Di Adamo at the union's head office (100 Lesmill Road, Toronto, ONT M3B 3P8, fax 416-448-7454, phone 1-800-268-7376 ext. 664 or 416-443-8888 ext. 664). Use the same routes to suggest additions to the line. ▲



Ontario Workers Arts & Heritage Centre

stories by Katie FitzRandolph
photos by Bill Majesky



Renée Johnston shows off
'a product of passion.'



Tucked beside the rail line in Hamilton is a heritage building with an interesting past and a dynamic present.

It's a cultural centre unlike any other in North America, dedicated to the arts and heritage of working people. Neither museum nor art gallery, it runs rotating exhibits interpreting the experience of working people to more than 10,000 visitors a year. People come from all over Canada and the U.S, and from as far away as Australia and Scandinavia.



An architectural gem, the centre shows off both its history and its exhibits to advantage.

“We’re unique,” said development director Renée Johnston. “We focus on popular education. We combine heritage and contemporary arts. We collect stories, and work with artists to develop them.”

The combined focus on art, heritage and labour draws in people who have never worked together before.

“There are stories and history that have been forgotten; that aren’t taught in school; that are undervalued. We aren’t art or artifact based. We’re more into the process linking people to history, learning from the past and planning for the future,” she said.

Hard times for a hidden treasure

The 1860 Customs House has known its share of hard times.

Marilyn Miller, a conservation advisor with the Ontario Heritage Foundation, recalls a boarded-up derelict that had been a macaroni factory from 1956 until the health department closed it in 1979.

Marilyn saw it as “a hidden treasure.”

Behind the neglect was a fine stone structure. The Foundation offered \$10,000 to anyone who would fix it up and donate an

easement, and later paid \$400,000 for a new roof and other restoration.

For Marilyn (now chair of the Employee Relations Committee for the Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation), it was “fun to see it finally become a labour museum, and a real plus that the building is now accessible to the public. It’s a public use. It has the right owners, who are really going to be able to show the place off.”

A product of passion

The centre is a product of passion, said Renée.

A core group of about eight activists met in each others homes in the late 80s asking why their lives weren’t reflected in museums, books and magazines.

They were looking for a way to balance negative media and be a force for change. They set up a non-profit corporation and did a feasibility study.

In 1995, they bought the old Custom House for \$475,000, and spent \$1 million on restoration, largely with grant money.

They opened with pride a year later, and now they run on an annual budget of about \$250,000

Steve Daynes photo



“We work with municipalities and other ministries to implement the Ontario Heritage Act to see they care for their designated buildings and other heritage resources. We’re concerned with environmental assessment, archaeology, museums, and buildings. The province and government have a role in heritage.”

– Marilyn Miller



The exhibit that's on until Dec. 17 is called Building Your Own Home.

– from foundations, unions, union locals and individuals. OPSEU provides an annual donation of \$5,000.

The impact of housing

People used to build their own homes then developers took over and gave us suburban sprawl. The results include schools closing in inner cities, and the decline of housing in the core areas, said Renée.

“How do we reclaim the activity of building our own home? We want to show ways in which, with government cooperation, but at little or no cost, owner building might help address the shortage of affordable housing.”

The blight of owner-built shanties has returned to haunt our cities in the form of lean-tos under the Gardiner Expressway and tent structures in the Don Valley. “Other countries have programs where people can create their own space. Why can't we?”



It's a history of owner-built housing. In the early part of the century, people built their own homes from what they could find by necessity.

The scope of service work

The exhibition which will open in January explores service work in Canada over the last century.

“We talk about work, life, love and family, domestic challenges, unionism, activism. We use heritage as a tool for activism,” said Renée.

People have contact with personal, community, commercial and public services every day. The exhibit will look at the common factors and the differences in these faces of the service economy. It will highlight the roles of youth, immigrants and women and look at the future of the service industry.

Among the themes to be explored are the difference between good and bad jobs and who does which; unionization in the service sector; the effect of privatization on service workers and the recipients; and the impact of volunteerism.



Then municipal councils became concerned about urban blight. The places looked terrible.



People were ordered to install plumbing or move out, if they couldn't afford the plumbing.

Workshops and outreach

The Ontario Workers Arts and Heritage Centre plans workshops and seminars in connection with its exhibits. An exhibit on child labour was planned by students from five area high schools, and included about 100 students in a discussion of Canada's role in child labour.

The centre wants to get its message into schools, and works closely with teachers and their unions.

It hosts performances, plays and music, and is looking to reach labour studies programs in the community colleges.

It's important because of the way that society is changing. People are more product-focused. Students don't know that people fought for things they now take for granted, said Renée. ▲

What does 'community art' mean?

Community art involves a collaboration between artists and a community of interest.

It could be a group of women, retirees, health care workers, or food bank volunteers. They come together and tell their stories, and decide what is the best vehicle for their story. It could be a video, poetry reading, a publication or an installation – like the garden (below).

Whatever the vehicle, the process is more important than the product. The product is a bonus, but the understanding and knowledge that come from the process are the main goal.

The artist's role is facilitator and interpreter and working with the group of people. ▲



In the garden of the Ontario Workers Arts and Heritage Centre is an installation of stones, earth and plants – the result of collaboration among immigrant women in Hamilton's North End and artist V. Jane Gordon. The stone maze tells of the difficulties and challenges the women faced getting services, learning English, and adapting to their new country. The mailbox holds letters in their own languages telling of their sorrows and struggles. Creating the work allowed the women to share their experiences, draw strength from each other, and find peace in their new land.

Science North meets labour history

'All We Worked For' is the first travelling exhibit organized by the Ontario Workers Arts and Heritage Centre (OWAHC).

Its insight into six specific workers' struggles opened Sept. 14 in Science North and ran to Oct. 11. A showing in Windsor is planned for early winter. Then it moves to Stellarton, N.S. and Montréal.

All We Worked For looks to Hamilton for the fight for the nine-hour working day; to British Columbia for an insight into the Industrial Workers of the World (the "Wobblies"); to Cape Breton for a look at the conflicts of the coal miners; to Winnipeg's garment industry for a view of the Great Depression; to Windsor for the pivotal Ford Strike; and to Quebec for the rising of public sector workers in the Common Front.

Each of these struggles has its own section in the display, and each has its own first person story.

The exhibit covers 1872 to 1972 in video, pictures and oral history.

A large board game illustrates the

difficulty making ends meet in the 1930s, and an education kit helps teachers interpret the exhibit and integrate it into their classroom work.

John Closs, president of Local 655, and his predecessor John Filo, were instrumental in negotiating the exhibit space at Science North.

"I've always had an interest in labour history so it was a natural," said Closs, a

carpentry teacher at Cambrian College.

"Science North was the venue we really wanted. It's an accessible public venue and it's nice to make the connection in the community with labour and Science North."

The labour council developed promotional material and put some money into the exhibit.

Renée Johnston of the arts and heritage centre said

OWAHC is very conscious of its Hamilton base and has always wanted to reach out to the rest of the province.

"We wanted to deliver something real to them.

"We want to get the word out to the colleges and the high schools. John Closs and John Filo helped position it in the right direction and arrange for setting it up and sponsorship.

"We want to get people thinking of doing things in their own community."

For Renée, the colleges are natural for the centre's approach to teaching through community arts. ▲

Canapress photo - J. Lightfoot



John Closs, president of Local 655, worked to get exhibit at Science North.



Canapress photo – S. Lake

**“Ultimately, we will achieve better collective agreements.”
– Stephanie Blake**

by Katie FitzRandolph

The Network for Better Contracts is spreading its roots

OPSEU’s April Convention endorsed a new policy to improve support for the union’s bargaining teams and bargaining goals.

A policy is good, but policies alone don’t make change. It takes action, commitment and leadership to move policies off paper and into reality.

President Leah Casselman outlined the moves started over the summer.

Local presidents will be surveyed in early fall on their needs, regional needs, and the support they need from regional offices.

Ministry, Divisional and Sector teams will be asked how the union can assist bargaining and meet sectoral needs.

Researchers will pull together details on all contracts, expiry dates, bargaining units and service areas.

A new “Intranet” will allow internal strategic discussion on bargaining.

OPSEU’s Executive Board approved this foundation for the Network for Better Contracts. Another move will realign staff who work in negotiations, grievances and job security for better communication along sectoral, divisional and ministry lines. Bargaining will reflect grievance history and build on work at labour-management committees.

Training for staff and members will focus on stronger collective bargaining.

Region 5 Executive Board Member Stephanie Blake has served on two Network for Better Contract committees. “I think people who are heading into bargaining will be the first to see the benefit. The others will see it further along. Ultimately, we will achieve better collective agreements.”

Pat Schillemore is president of Local 365 and chair of the University Sector. Early discussions about the new network arose at the Broader Public Service conference last fall. “Sector leaders looked at how we do things and how we bargain strong collective agreements.”

In January, sector executives looked two years ahead. Their plans include training for bargaining teams, communication within sectors, finding the best contract language and coordinated bargaining.

“I think it will standardize our collective agreements and raise standards,” said Pat. “We’ll take the best language as the bottom line and build stronger agreements from that.”

“Training for bargaining teams will ensure they don’t spent their first sessions learning the process. If training happens before demand setting, team members can lead in developing priority demands, achievable demands and in explaining issues. Some issues involve long-term gains, and people naturally think of what is most immediately important to them, Pat said.

Stephanie says this training will help teams bargain good agreements.

The Network for Better Contracts puts sharper focus on the collective bargaining cycle, rather than the political cycles around union conventions and local elections.

Her first bargaining experience was with the late senior negotiator André Bekerman, who made a practice of training the teams he worked with. “We were fortunate because we had André.”

Pat thinks the new Network will build solidarity. “Coordinated bargaining will show members and locals they aren’t alone and that there are others dealing with the same issues. It will help to establish pride in the union and I think that’s important.

“When you achieve something because several locals are working on the same issues, people will feel that they are part of the broader movement.”

Pat stressed communication – using technology to distribute information and get feedback. Her local newsletter comes out monthly, supplementing regular meetings and electronic communication.

“We don’t go to the table for another year, but we are starting to build now. Our newsletter in June talked about labour relations problems and the potential for that having an impact on our income next summer. We’re not saying we will be on strike in a year, but we’re starting to prepare people.”

Stephanie agrees: “I can give one clear example. When we bargained last time, management wanted to bring in merit pay, as it had with faculty and CUPE. We went into demand setting with emails and leaflets and rallies around the issue and members voted unanimously against any form of merit pay. Management never even put it on the table. Our communication and mobilization worked.”

Her local continues to mobilize around bargaining. “In the past, the team tried to do it all. Now we have a group of members who are not on the team who will be in charge of communication, mobilizing, and strike preparation. If necessary, they would form the strike committee.

The Network for Better Contracts puts sharper focus on the collective bargaining



Canapress photo – P. Marchen

“Crisis management is a high adrenaline way of operating, or you can plan ahead and control your response and have better effect.” – Pat Schillemore

cycle, rather than the political cycles around union conventions and local elections.

For Pat, it’s a question of thinking more strategically. “It could be considered more work if you haven’t taken ownership in collective bargaining before, but it’s really more a question of using our energies in a different way. Crisis management is a high adrenaline way of operating, or you can plan ahead and control your response and have a better effect.

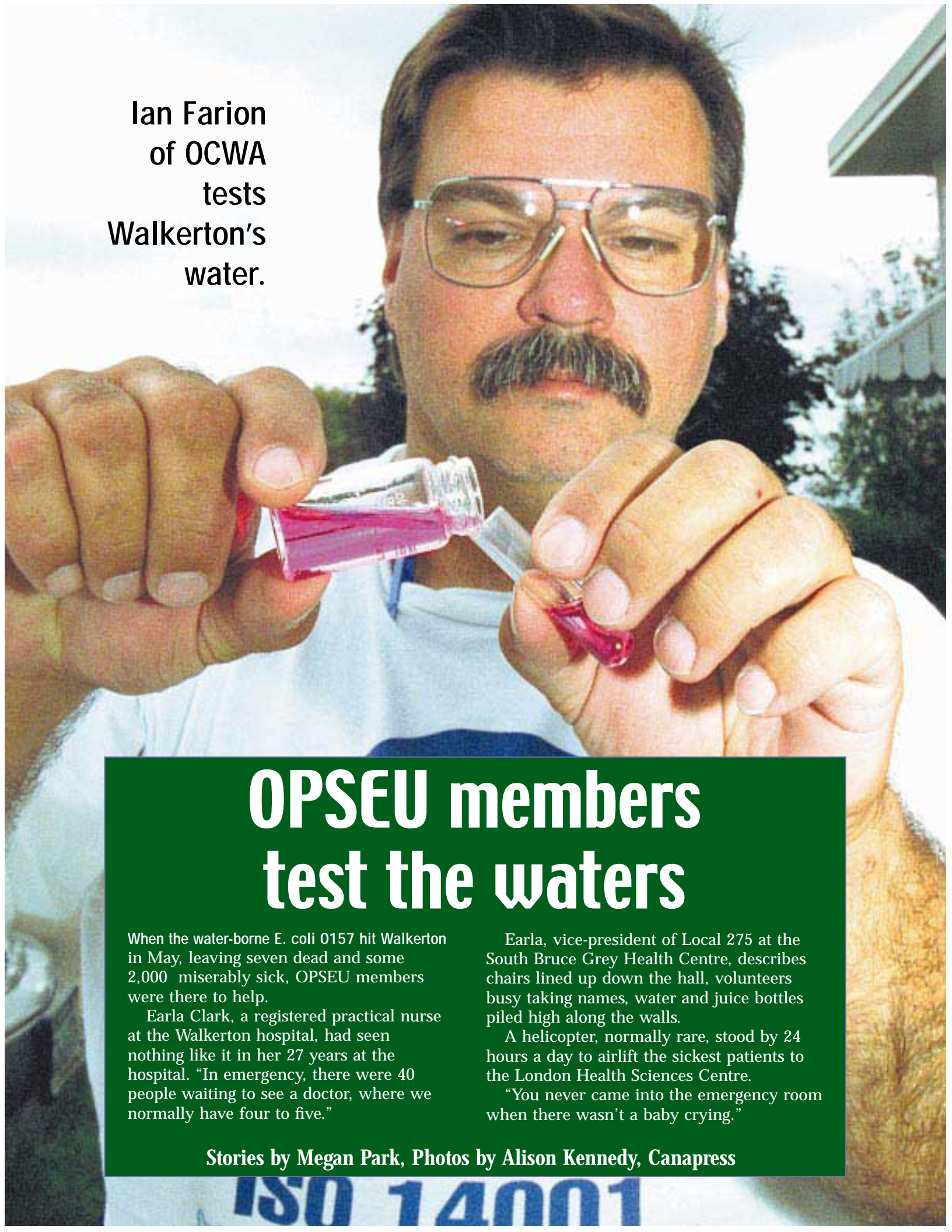
“Management is probably thinking it’s about time we caught on.”

Region 3 Executive Board Member Pauline Tapping points out that the OPS contract is only one of more than 400 OPSEU collective agreements. For her, the new network “shares

things that have worked in other sectors and other bargaining units. We build on each others’ strengths and successes.”

Terry Stinson of Local 436, chair of the 1999 OPS bargaining team, agrees that the real route to any trade union is bargaining collective agreements for members and enforcing them. “And you have to do both to keep your members happy.”

“I hope this initiative will educate delegates to demand setting that they have a job to do – at that meeting, and continuing until the new collective agreement is in place. The job is just about anything: local organizer, local leader, communications steward, strike preparation and strike organization.” ▲

A close-up photograph of a man with a mustache and glasses, wearing a white t-shirt, pouring a pink liquid from a small glass vial into a test tube. He is looking intently at the liquid. The background is slightly blurred, showing some greenery and a building.

Ian Farion
of OCWA
tests
Walkerton's
water.

OPSEU members test the waters

When the water-borne E. coli 0157 hit Walkerton in May, leaving seven dead and some 2,000 miserably sick, OPSEU members were there to help.

Earla Clark, a registered practical nurse at the Walkerton hospital, had seen nothing like it in her 27 years at the hospital. "In emergency, there were 40 people waiting to see a doctor, where we normally have four to five."

Earla, vice-president of Local 275 at the South Bruce Grey Health Centre, describes chairs lined up down the hall, volunteers busy taking names, water and juice bottles piled high along the walls.

A helicopter, normally rare, stood by 24 hours a day to airlift the sickest patients to the London Health Sciences Centre.

"You never came into the emergency room when there wasn't a baby crying."

Stories by Megan Park, Photos by Alison Kennedy, Canapress

ISO 14001

The lab was hectic. "No one realized at the beginning the extent of the outbreak," said Shirley Read, a laboratory technologist for 26 years at the hospital. Fast decisions responded to the ever-changing situation.

The boil water order was issued May 21. For the first few days, staff worked from 7:30 a.m. to 11 p.m. Then extra staff came in and an afternoon shift was added.

In two weeks, they clocked over 1,000 hours of overtime, taking and testing blood and urine samples so doctors could track patients' kidney function. E. coli 0157 can cause kidney failure in children and seniors.

In those two weeks, the lab handled 890 adult and 509 paediatric blood samples.

The lab's turnaround and accuracy impressed paediatricians in from Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children.

They did about 50 times the normal number of children's blood tests, Shirley said. "It's stressful taking blood from young children. They're sick, they don't understand why you're doing it and it hurts. Our lab assistants and volunteers did a great job."

Donations of toys helped ease the trauma.

"You'd go home at night and your mind wouldn't stop thinking about the situation. It was hard to sleep," said Carol Shantz, a laboratory technologist and steward in Local 275.

"Many of us knew some of the families affected," said Carol. "We had first hand interaction with the sick and our prayers were with them."

Other hospital departments had different pressures. Maintenance staff worked with the Ministry of Environment and the Ontario Clean Water Agency to bring in water tankers and install temporary supply lines. Dietary



Earla Clark

staff couldn't use tap water as they made coffee and muffins for people waiting in emergency and freezies for the children.

Across the street from the hospital, members of Local 276 work at the Grey Bruce Owen Sound Health Unit. The health unit sounded the first alarm over Walkerton's water.

"It was a pretty intense time," said Local 276 president Kim McDougall-Hodge.

"We were dealing with hundreds of calls a day and probably the same number of people coming to the counter," Kim said.

As well as getting information out, public health inspectors helped the Ministry of Environment and the Ontario Clean Water Agency with water sampling. Inspectors from other areas came in to help, working evenings and weekends to answer the public's questions.

As *Our Ontario* went to press, Walkerton residents continue to boil their water.

OPSEU members who live outside of town say they feel guilty about being able to go home. "We get a break from it," said Linda Alexander, a dietary aide.

Gerry Hope has lived all his life in Walkerton. President of Local 225, he is a correctional officer at the Walkerton jail. Two members of his family suffered in the outbreak.

"The hardest thing is not knowing when things can return to normal," he said.

Local 225 donated \$500 to a trust fund for families affected by the tragedy. OPSEU has set up a fund to help. Donations may be made at any Bank of Montreal in Ontario (account 0032-8097467) or to the OPSEU regional office at 1038 Second Avenue East, Owen Sound, N4K 2H7. ▲



Gerry Hope

Walkerton's water claimed an OPSEU member

Betty Trushinski, 56, was one of seven people who died from tainted Walkerton water.

A member of Local 275 at the South Bruce Grey Health Centre she was a 28-year employee in the dietary department.

"The thing we remember most about Betty, is that she was always bubbly, she was always in a good mood," said

Linda Alexander, a dietary aide. "It seems so quiet now."

"Betty's death hits OPSEU members and indeed, all Ontarians, close to home," said OPSEU president Leah Casselman. "Our thoughts are with her loved ones." ▲





Left to right: Linda Alexander and Carol Shantz from Local 275, Kim McDougall-Hodge, Local 276

Walkerton tragedy affects whole OPSEU family

A dedicated group of OPSEU members have been working tirelessly to restore clean and safe drinking water to Walkerton.

They came from across Ontario and from many workplaces: the Ontario Clean Water Agency, the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Grey Bruce Owen Sound Health Unit. Some retirees came back to help. Most volunteered, leaving their families and friends to work 12- and 14-hour days to make Walkerton's water safe.

"The team approach has been incredible," said Carl Grimstead, a compliance auditor from OCWA in London, in Walkerton since June 8.

Carl and his colleagues oversee a small army of plumbers, contractors and their own staff – all struggling to clean and disinfect the water system.

Carl says it's impossible to outline a typical day. "They are never the same and they are always full. Whenever the least little thing goes wrong, we get a call and we go out and fix it immediately," he said.

Bruce Hawkins, a surface water evaluator from MOE's London office arrived in Walkerton June 7. He co-ordinates an alternate water supply which sends water from a neighbouring town to the hospital, jail, two senior citizen residences and a public shower and washroom. He's helped by MNR workers who normally fight forest fires in the north.

OCWA and MOE staff wear special t-shirts. "You can't go into a donut shop or restaurant without people coming up and talking to you," said Bruce.

Never far from OPSEU members' minds are their colleagues back home who are picking up their assignments in workplaces that have already suffered major cutbacks.

"I am so proud of OPSEU members who have dropped everything to help the people of Walkerton," said OPSEU president Leah Casselman. "Tragedies like Walkerton underline the importance of public services. OCWA and MOE have had their staff and budgets slashed by the Harris government." ▲

OPSEU has a role in Walkerton Inquiry

OPSEU has official standing at the Walkerton Inquiry.

The Inquiry has three parts. OPSEU has different standing in each:

1. The causes of the Walkerton events apart from government practices: OPSEU can protect the interests of directly-involved members.
2. The effect, if any, of government policies,

procedures and practices: OPSEU has full standing, as part of a union group. The inquiry commissioner suggested OPSEU should take the lead for the group because of its "broad representation of provincial government employees."

3. General water safety issues: OPSEU has full standing. "Our members and staff have done a tremendous

amount of thinking, talking, researching and writing to get us to this point," said OPSEU President Leah Casselman. "The Inquiry gives us a chance to help restore accountability and safety to Ontario's drinking water system."

For more information, check the OPSEU web site at www.opseu.org or the official inquiry web site at www.walkertoninquiry.com. ▲