



Photo: Emily Visser

The Ontario Public Service bargaining team — top row: Brian Gould, Dan Vincent, Dennis Wilson, Derek Miller, Richard Cunningham, Pete Wright, Dave Graves, David Kerr, Roxanne Barnes, Eric Morin, Rob Field bottom row: Nathan Aubin, Ruth Hamilton, Linda Ferguson, Anne Pereira, Karrie Ouchas, Jennifer Roukkula, Shelley McCormick, Paul Johnstone, Alicia Czekierda, John Mearini, Jim Finnegan, Tom O'Neill, Carl Thibodeau, Cindy Abric-Forsyth. Absent: Chris Cormier

# Ontario Public Service bargaining makes history

by Don Ford

At 3:45 a.m. on Dec. 24, 2008, the Central and Unified Bargaining Teams for the Ontario Public Service (OPS) did what no bargaining team had done since the OPS gained the right to strike: They achieved a tentative agreement without having to take a strike vote, and got it before the current contract expired.

For OPSEU, this was a ground-breaking achievement.

“We have made huge strides in OPS bargaining,” said Eric Morin, Chair of the Central/Unified teams in a message to all OPS members. “From the beginning, we told the employer and our members that all we wanted was a fair and reasonable offer. We believe that we have it.”

At the Corrections table, things did not go as smoothly. That employer stood firm on a proposal to remove correctional officers and youth workers from the OPS sick time plan, and the team refused to back down. It took an 89 per cent strike vote and two more months of talks before Corrections could reach an agreement.

“The bargaining team asked the members for support, and that’s exactly what we got,” said David Kerr, team chair. “The employer knew they weren’t just dealing with the seven members at the bargaining table; they were dealing with all 6,000 members in our division, supported by the entire union.”

This round of OPS bargaining also differed from the others on the process. This time, the teams bargained issues first, not essential services.

“Many members wanted the bargaining teams to concentrate on the issues instead of negotiating what would happen if there was a strike,” Morin said. “That’s exactly what we did, and I think it worked out well for all of us.”

