



# Corporations Tax Agreement Signed

Provincial and federal governments sign long awaited Memorandum of Agreement

On October 6, 2006, Greg Sorbera, provincial Minister of Finance, and Jim Flaherty, federal Minister of Finance, signed a Memorandum of Agreement that will begin the process of a single tax administration policy for Corporations Tax in the Province of Ontario. Approximately 600 Ministry of Finance employees and members of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union have been waiting for this announcement since November 2004.

Currently, corporate taxpayers submit separate tax returns to the two levels of government. This new agreement would mean one return and one remittance, collected by the federal government, similar to what happens with personal income

tax returns.

It is anticipated that some services provided by provincial employees will be transferred to the federal government by 2009. However, this will not take place until several sub agreements are signed. A Human Resources Agreement and



PASSING the BUREAUCRACY

Business Services Transition Agreement are yet to be signed. “The key points that affected members should keep in mind,” says Kathleen Demareski, OPSEU Local 340 President and Corporate Tax Administration Redesign (CTAR) Working Group co-chair “is that nothing will happen until the Human Resources Agreement is signed. This sub agreement will detail how the transfer will affect them. The exact numbers of affected employees cannot be determined until the Human Resources Agreement has been fully negotiated. We will nego-

tiate the best possible agreement with our member’s best interests at heart.”

*Continued on page 3*

Authorized for distribution by  
Kathleen Demareski, Local 340 President

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## What's Inside

Are we duplication?	3
Pension seminars coming soon	4
Psychological harassment	5
Employee Assistance Program	6
Drug card benefits	6
Attendance Support Program	7
Appealing OPS benefit claims	8
Greening OPSEU	9
What you need to know about...	10
Local 340 auditor volunteers for Katrina clean up one year later	12
Health and safety	14
Discover the joys of credit under control	15
Humour in the workplace	16
June 23 proclaimed French Heritage Day	16
Editor's message	16

### Editorial Policy

We invite Local 340 members to feel a sense of ownership of *Hidden Treasures* and our website. It is our intent that this publication will relate to local issues as well as share information from OPSEU corporate.

We encourage members to submit articles for publication. Where an article contains a by-line, the views are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Local officers and stewards.

All articles must be signed and should contribute to the welfare of the Local, the Union and its members. If a person or office is named in an article, they will be given an opportunity to respond in the same issue.

We reserve the right to edit for libel, length and clarity.

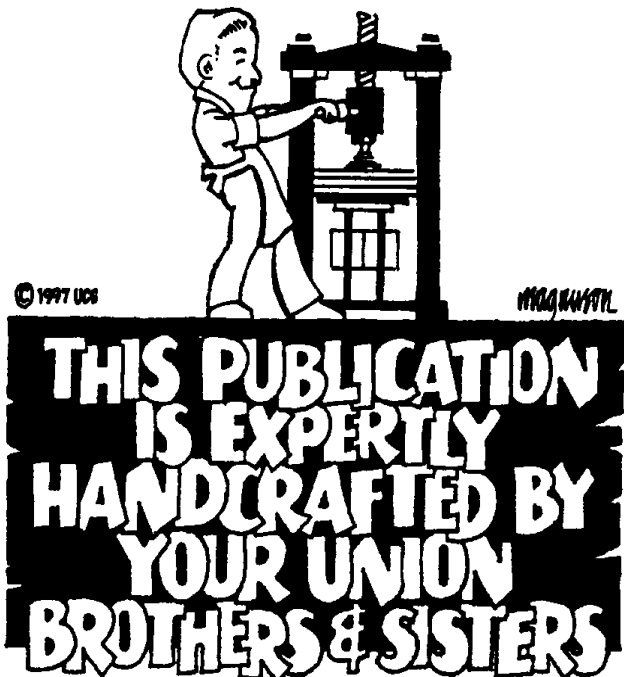
# Local 340 Executive

## Officers

Kathleen Demareski, President  
John Mohcikas, Vice-President  
Karrie Ouchas, Chief Steward  
Art Slade, Treasurer  
Norm Bell, Secretary

## Stewards

Brenda Bryant (currently unavailable)  
Sandra Carter, Health and Safety Co-chair  
Rox Cox  
Diana Dawson (currently unavailable)  
Julie Folino  
Kelly Howe  
David Loeffen  
Betty Marchegiano  
Benjamin Ng  
Nancy Robinson  
Ina Spence  
Terri Stevens  
Bonnie Wheeler  
Genevieve Williams  
Cathy Wood  
Paul Zapp



*Continued from page 1*

The Business Services Transition Agreement negotiations will take place simultaneously with the Human Resources Agreement negotiations. It will detail what services are to be transferred to the federal government and when. Some services will be transferred over as early as 2007.

It should be noted that, until all negotiations are complete, there is a blackout in affect. The CTAR Working Group has committed to sharing information as soon as it becomes available for release.

“This transition will, without a doubt, be stressful for everyone,” states Demareski.

“Members must recognize when the stress is getting too much, that they get the help they need throughout these changing times. Our members must not isolate themselves. Together, we will make it through these changes.”

If you are in need of counseling or guidance, there are several resources members can access. Contact a Change Management and Transition Agent or the Employee Assistance Program provider.

For more information about CTAR and the Memorandum of Agreement, visit the employer’s intranet site or contact a member of the CTAR Working Group.

# Are we duplication?

*by Benjamin Ng*

*Union Steward and Local 340 Communications Committee*

In November 2004, the Government of Ontario announced that it would transfer the administration of corporate income tax to the federal government in a project called Corporation Tax Administration Re-Design (CTAR). As we approach the second anniversary of this announcement, I think this time would be a good opportunity to reflect on the reasons for the Province of Ontario to maintain control of its own corporate tax administration. After all, Ontario must have good reasons for being in this tax business for decades despite many changes in government among the three different political parties over the years.

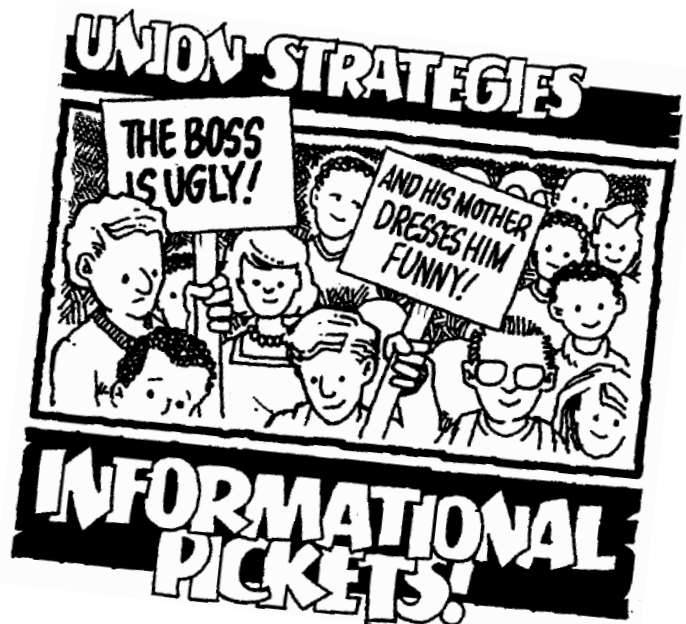
First, Ontario would lose revenues generated from interest, penalties and audit recoveries it currently enjoys. According to *Taxing Times*, the interest and penalties are \$90 million annually and audit recoveries equal approximately \$400 million annually, give or take.

In return for giving up almost half a billion dollars, Ontario would receive a one time up front payment of \$400 million from the federal government. If this deal from the federal government is so favourable, then we should expect Alberta and Quebec to announce similar

deals, as well, being the remaining two provinces to have self-administered corporate tax systems.

Second, the transfer would relegate the Ontario portion of corporate income tax to a one or two page schedule on the federal tax return, with the flexibility of a straight jacket for addressing fiscal and economic issues in Ontario. The Premier has already publicly complained about the fiscal imbalance from the federal

*Continued on page 4*





# Pension seminars coming soon

Have you ever wondered what your pension options are if you leave your job, when you can retire or how to buy back credit for past service?

OPTrust Direct Contact sessions are being held in locations across the province.

Upcoming sessions, held from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. include the following locations:

November 21, 2006—Oshawa

Holiday Inn  
1011 Bloor Street East

November 29, 2006—Toronto

Metro Toronto Convention Centre  
255 Front Street West

December 5, 2006—Scarborough

Ramada Don Valley Hotel  
185 Yorkland Boulevard

Lunch and learn sessions may also be upcoming. Ask your Human Resources representatives if a meeting is going to be held in your area.



"We're doing a seminar on growing old gracefully."

*Continued from page 3*

government for Ontario. Does the province need even more inflexibility from the dependence on the federal overheads? Specific examples are the minimum, premium and withholding tax on non-residents that are also administered along with income tax in the corporate tax program. These other taxes were and are not designed to be simplified by piggy backing off a federal base. Can we hope that the feds will take the time to learn and enforce every Ontario initiative or give the province a bigger piece of their pie to compensate Ontario?

Third, the consequences of low employee morale and high turnover were felt before the agreement was even signed. There are employees of the corporate income tax program that have taken pre-emptive action to beat the transfer by taking position in other programs, such as Retail Sales Tax in the Motor Fuels and Tobacco Tax Branch. Some have even left the Ontario Public Service for jobs with Canada Revenue Agency.

This government's own Human Resources Branch knows that the retirement of many baby boomers by the turn of the decade and the ensuing competition among employers in private and public sector for qualified staff will be intense. How can the Ontario government afford to put itself at a competitive disadvantage as it approaches a crucial staff shortage that will affect customer service?

If the Ontario government is worried about possible consequences of giving up the CTAR project, I can give assurance that the worst case scenario of businesses leaving Ontario (like they left Quebec in the 1970's during the separatist movement) will not happen. Despite the so called "hardship" of preparing an Ontario return, Ontario is home to automotive, manufacturing, financial services, technology and the retail industries.

As we can see, the diversity in the industries of the provincial economy, Ontario is not losing economic competitiveness to neighbouring jurisdictions. These strategic industries and the expanding tax roll base over the last decade are, in my opinion, a vote of confidence in the current Ontario income tax administration and its staff.

# Psychological harassment

Some excerpts from [www.cnt.gouv.qc.ca](http://www.cnt.gouv.qc.ca)

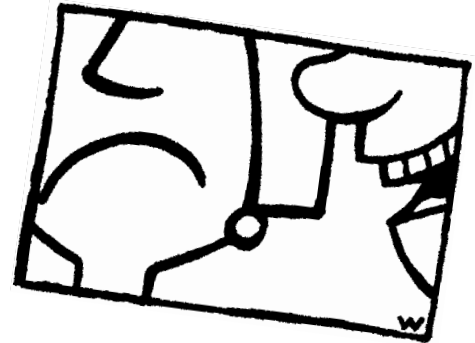
Imagine this. You are a long time employee with the government of Ontario. A situation arises where your senior manager falsely accuses you of causing a particular incident within your unit. How does this senior manager address his concern with you? He insists on meeting with you in a stairwell, where he proceeds to berate and belittle you. You have no opportunity to respond and are not offered any union representation. There are no witnesses. You become visibly upset. The manager's comment is to suggest you go home for the rest of the day and that you may wish to arrange for someone to drive you because it is obvious you are too emotional to drive yourself.

Believe it or not, this actually happened to an OPSEU member in 2005. This manager has a history of such behaviour. He ensures there are rarely any witnesses to verify the allegations being made against him. His employees report regularly that they feel intimidated, stressed and unhappy.

Is this considered psychological harassment? Psychological harassment is any humiliating or abusive behaviour that lowers a person's self-esteem. The behaviour exceeds what the person would consider to be appropriate and reasonable in the performance of hi/her work.

Psychological harassment is defined under four criteria:

repetitive, hostile and unwanted, affects the person's dignity or psychological integrity and results in a harmful work environment.



Individuals react differently to psychological harassment. Victims can suffer from physical ailments, irritability, anxiety, nervousness, insomnia, stress, fatigue, depressive states, burn out and, in some cases, suicide.

The best way to combat psychological harassment is prevention. It is the employer's responsibility to take reasonable steps to prevent this type of harassment from happening and to put a stop to it as soon as they become aware its occurring in the work place.

If you feel that you are the victim of psychological harassment, talk about it with someone you trust. Do not remain isolated. Talk to a union steward, a manager you trust or someone you feel comfortable with in Human Resources. If you don't feel you have someone you can talk to about the situation, contact the Employee Assistance Provide – FGI World – at 1-800-363-3872. Tell the person who is the source to cease the unwanted behaviour immediately. Bring the matter to the attention of the employer who must put a stop to it by taking the appropriate steps.

As for the senior manager at the beginning of this article, steps have been and will continue to be taken to ensure that no other OPSEU member will ever have to suffer from his inappropriate behaviour again.





# Employee Assistance Program



by Kelly Howe  
Union Steward and Local 340 Communications Committee

The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a program offered to provide assistance to an employee, their dependants and family members living in the same residence, if they want or need it. Any employee of the Ministry, no matter if they are classified, unclassified, on an approved leave of absence, or receiving benefits under a disability plan may use it.

Some of the professional services offered through the EAP are personal and work related counseling, bereavement, legal issues and alcohol or drug abuse. The EAP providers will connect you with one of their own psychologists, social workers and addiction counselors. These services are, for the most part paid, by the employer as long as the counseling needed is on a short-term basis.

If you are looking for legal advice, you can call the EAP for referral to a lawyer that may provide you with a half hour free consultation meeting. It is important to note that the Ministry will not pay for your legal fees.

To all of our members affected by CTAR and the Memorandum of Agreement that was just recently signed, this may be a great way to alleviate stress that has been building up by talking to someone who is an outsider that will just listen and provide advice if you need it. Remember it is completely confidential. Our provider is FGI World. They are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Your call and access to services is kept completely confidential. If you need help or just need to talk to someone, contact FGI World at 1-800-268-5211 or TDD 1-800-363-6270.

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## Drug card benefits

by Art Slade,  
Treasurer and Local 340 Communications Committee

It's about time! During the last round of bargaining, we finally received a drug card. The Ontario Public Service (OPS) is finally moving into the 21<sup>st</sup> century by offering its employees the benefit of a drug card.

What does this mean to you? Well, let's see.

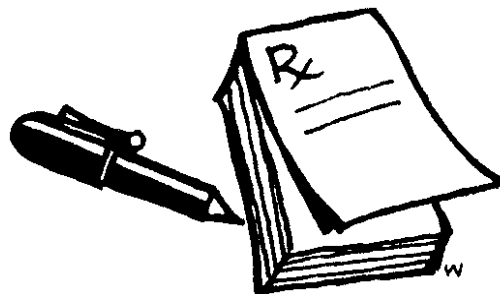
If your pharmacy accepts drug cards, that means that you no longer have to pay for prescriptions up front and get reimbursed later. All you have to pay is the \$3.00 deductible and 10% of the drug cost.

All members who have family coverage should have

completed the "positive enrolment" program on the employers Workforce Information Network (WIN). If you haven't, contact Ontario Shared Services (OSS) for an application. Those with family coverage will receive two cards. If you require more cards, such as for a child away at college or university, contact Manulife directly.

If you have single coverage, a card will be mailed to automatically. It is important to ensure that your address is up to date to receive your cards.

For more information or to ensure your enrolment, contact OSS at 1-866-979-9300.



# Attendance Support Program

by Kelly Howe

Union Steward and Local 340 Communications Committee

The Attendance Support Program (ASP) is one of three components that make up the Injury, Illness and Employee Accommodation Program. It is a non-punitive program designed to improve attendance by helping an employee return to work and when necessary, to provide accommodation. Every employee has the right to Union representation during an ASP meeting. If an employee does not wish to have representation, they must decline it in writing.

How does someone become enrolled in this program? It can happen in one of two ways: either an employee has exceeded the ministry threshold of 10.1 days (which is determined by the Ministry's absenteeism average per year) or they have voluntarily entered the program because they know of an existing accommodation need and that they will exceed the threshold. Any day that an employee reports to their manager as a sick day will count, regardless of how they were compensated for it. Days where an employee is absent due to a child, spouse, parent, etc., being sick will not count towards the threshold, nor will any absences under WSIB or LTIP (long-term income protection).

There are three levels to the ASP. When an employee is coming close to the threshold, their manager should hold an informal meeting reviewing the principles of the program and give the employee current information about the program. If it is not possible to have a meeting, the manager should ensure the employee receives information prior to the first level one

meeting. Once enrolled, the employee will receive a letter requesting a formal meeting. Level one lasts for six months with a possibility of a one-time six-month extension. If the goals are not met in level one, an employee will enter level two, which lasts six months with no extension. Finally, if the goals outlined in level two are not met, the employee will enter level three, which lasts three to six months. If an employee does not meet the goals set out in level

three, "a decision will be made about an extension for further monitoring, or job change, reassignment, demotion or termination." (Section 4.3 of ASP Manual).

Normally employees improve their attendance in level one. If there is an accommodation due to a disability, a manager may set a personal absenteeism threshold for an employee so they will not constantly re-enter the program. If at any time an employee achieves their goals, they will exit the ASP.

However, if they exceed either their personal threshold or the Ministry's within 24 months after exiting the program, they will enter back into the ASP at the same level they exited.

The most important thing to remember about the ASP is that it is not meant to discipline an employee! It is to the benefit of the employer if their employees are happy healthy individuals. The ASP helps to improve attendance by recognizing any accommodation that is needed and provides individualized goal setting to help employees return to work.



# Appealing OPS benefit claims

*taken from OPSEU publication*

## **What insured benefits can I appeal?**

- Supplementary Health and Hospital Insurance
- Dental
- Long Term Income Protection Plan (LTIP)
- Group Life Insurance (including Basic, Supplementary and Dependant Life Insurance)
- Any other benefits that may be added to the Group Insurance Plan

## **Why would I want to appeal an insured Benefit claim that had been denied?**

- Your claim may have been improperly denied
- Claims that are denied today may highlight important bargaining demands tomorrow

## **How can I appeal claims for denied insured benefits?**

If you work in the Ontario Public Service (OPS) and represented by OPSEU, then you can appeal the denial through the Joint Insurance Benefits Review Committee (JIBRC). The JIBRC is comprised of four OPSEU representatives and four Employer representatives from Management Board Secretariat.

The OPSEU member representatives are John O'Brien, Carl Thibodeau and Bob Houston.

The OPSEU staff representative is Diana Clarke.

The Joint Insurance Benefits Review Committee will review the claim problems and attempt to resolve the appeal. OPSEU takes an active role in the Committee meetings as your advocate. All information submitted to the JIBRC is confidential. Meetings are usually held monthly.

If the appeal cannot be resolved at the Committee level, the appeal can be referred to the Claims Review Subcommittee and will be heard before designated arbitrators.

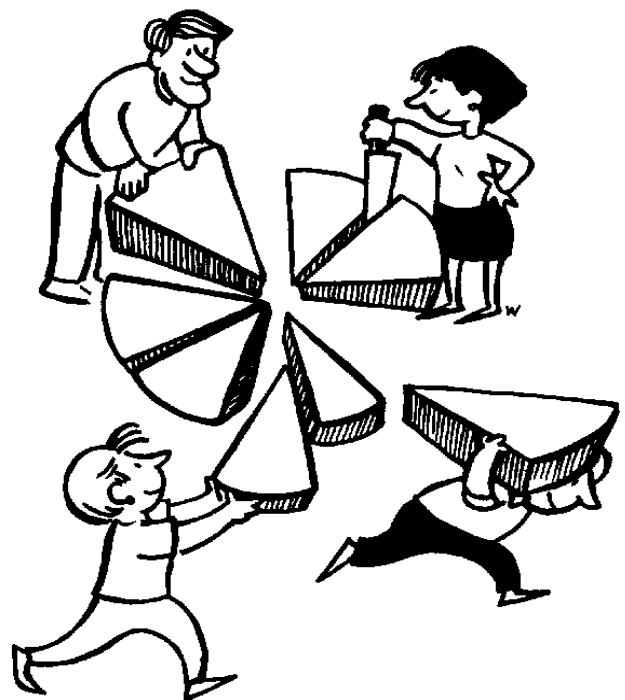
## **How do I commence an appeal to the Joint Insurance Benefits Review Committee?**

Discuss your complaint with your employer, the union and the insurance carrier when you become aware of the denial of benefits by the insurance carrier. Sometimes, submitting additional information directly to the insurance carrier may resolve the problem.

If the complaint is not satisfactorily resolved, you can appeal, in writing, to the Joint Insurance Benefits Review Committee by mailing written information about what you wish to appeal, copies of any denials from the insurance carrier and a completed insured benefits appeal form (Appendix 5 of the Collective Agreement) to:

Diana Clarke, Benefits Counsellor  
Ontario Public Service Employees Union  
100 Lesmill Road  
Toronto ON M3B 3P8

For more information, read Appendix 4 of the Collective Agreement or call OPSEU Direct at 1-800-268-7376.





# Greening OPSEU

by Art Slade,  
Treasurer and Local 340 Communications Committee

At the 2006 OPSEU Annual Convention, delegates approved an union-wide action plan for “*Working for a healthier and safer environment*”. The union’s plan is to ensure that all OPSEU members become more informed about environmental issues, set achievable goals and inform members about the union’s activities and workplace issues. From this, a plan has been developed, called “Greening OPSEU”.

The plan was developed with the assistance from the Toronto Environmental Alliance and Public Interest. To begin the process, the team gathered information about OPSEU operations. Buildings, transportation, bargaining processes, campaigns and workplace issues were investigated and discussion were held in each Region with the membership.

So far, OPSEU has introduced recycling programs, pesticide free environments and energy efficient lighting. Also, our pension plans have some environmental considerations when investing our money in the markets. During the last annual convention, delegates were given reusable mugs and we reduced paper use. This is just the beginning.

## OPSEU’s Green Vision

The union has been a leader in campaigning on environmental issues. OPSEU members

clearly want the union to be a part of the solution to environmental problems.

OPSEU’s action plan is:

1. A network of green stewards
2. Standing up for green jobs
3. A greener union
4. Greener workplaces
5. Greener pensions and funds
6. Greener lifestyles
7. Greener labour movement
8. Greener communities.

Four key steps to achieving this goal includes:

1. Building on our greatest resource: the interest and concern of our members for the environment.
2. Leading by example: reducing energy and paper use at Convention.
3. Develop tools for greening workplaces and educational resources for members.
4. Build an environmental component into union education.

More green initiatives will be listed on [www.opseu.org](http://www.opseu.org) as they are developed.

For more information concerning Greening OPSEU, contact Gino Franche, Patty Rout or Laurie Brown. All can be reached by email from OPSEU’s website, using the following link: [www.opseu.org/notices/greeningopseu.htm](http://www.opseu.org/notices/greeningopseu.htm) or by fax, care of Anita Aberback, at (416) 443-0553.



**Greening OPSEU**  
**Écologisation du SEFPO**

# What you need to know about...

## Competition Grievances

You didn't get the job but feel that the competition may have been flawed. What do you do?

Start by making sure you understand Article 22 of the Collective Agreement – Grievance Procedure.

You must ask for a post-interview meeting. Explain to the manager that you will be considering the post-interview meeting Stage 1 in the process, as required under the Collective Agreement, if you should choose to file a grievance. If you any concerns about the competition or the competition process, this is the time to voice it and allow the manager a chance to respond (seven days per the Collective Agreement).

Take notes. Follow up with the manager conducting the post-interview meeting with an email summarizing your understanding of what was discussed. Ask the manager to respond if you have misunderstood anything and/or to respond to your concerns about the competition within prescribed timelines.

Watch your timelines. You only have 15 days to file a grievance from when the manager responds to your concerns. Grievance forms can be obtained from a Union Steward.

If the manager fails to meet the prescribed timelines, make sure you don't miss yours. The union will file a preliminary objection for the

employer failing to meet the prescribed timelines.

The Chief Steward will assign a file number and forward your grievance to Human Resources. The Chief Steward will include a cover letter and a disclosure request. Copies of all documents drafted on your behalf will be provided to you and kept in a Local file.

The disclosure request may include the request for specific information/documentation, such as ranking, test/interview questions and expected responses, the responses of the successful candidates, the response of the grievor, seniority dates, etc.

Once disclosure is

received, the representing Union Steward will review with you all the information provided by the employer.

A competition grievance will only be successful if a fatal flaw is discovered.

When reviewing disclosure, the union will be looking for several key components:

1. Are there three test methods?
2. Are the assigned marks clearly indicated?

3. Is the marking consistent between all panelists?
4. Does the ranking consider seniority (relative equality)?
5. Does the union reach the same conclusion of scoring (with a variance of no more than 3 or

*Continued on page 11*



*Continued from page 12*  
4 marks overall)?

If no evidence can be found to prove that there was a flaw in these areas, and there is no other evidence of a flawed competition, the union will recommend you withdraw the grievance and encourage you to learn and grow from the experience.

If evidence is found that substantiates a fatal flaw in the competition, such as inconsistent or incorrect scoring, arguments will be prepared for the Stage 2 hearing. This is your grievance to which you must be actively and equally involved in preparing. The Union Steward will assist and provide you with advice throughout the process.

At the Stage 2 hearing, your Union Steward will present arguments and evidence to the Designee, which you have prepared together. If the grievance is denied, you will be notified. It will be up to you to direct the Chief Steward to file a request for Stage 3 hearing before the Grievance Settlement Board (GSB).

Something to consider when determining your settlement desired. When drafting your grievance or negotiating a settlement, be sure that the settlement desired is reasonable. It is unlikely that you will be awarded financial compensation for pain and suffering without strong evidence nor will you be entitled to retroactive payments prior to the date the position was actually filled.

## **Article 6 – Posting and filling of vacancies or new positions**

Most questions raised relating to this Article are the re-opener clause (6.1.2) and relative equality (6.3).

Article 6.1.2 allows for the employer may hire qualified candidates who previously applied for a similar vacancy or new position within 12 months of the original competition. There is no requirement for the employer to repost the competition.

Under Article 6.3, the employer shall give primary consideration to qualifications and



ability to perform the required duties. If candidates are equally qualified, seniority is considered. It is understood that equally qualified is determined if the successful incumbents have scored within 8 to 10 marks of one another, at which point seniority would determine the successful candidate.

## **Article 8 – Temporary Assignments**

The biggest concern raised by members about this Article is 8.6.1 and 8.6.3.

Article 8.6.1 clearly states that temporary assignments should be for less than six (6) months in duration and that specific dates of the terms are to be established at least two (2) months in advance of commencement of the temporary assignment. Otherwise, the employer is required to post the position and hold a competition under Article 6. There is one exception. Temporary assignments may be extended pending the posting of a competition for the job, under Article 6.

If the incumbent has held the position for at least eighteen (18) months pending a competition under Article 6 of the Collective Agreement, the employer may assign him or her the position a permanent basis. In other words, if an employee has been doing the job for 18 months on the basis of an upcoming competition, the employer can use discretion in giving the position permanently to the person currently doing the job.

# Local 340 auditor volunteers for Katrina clean up one year later

by Nancy Robinson  
Union Steward and Local 340 Communications Committee

Carla Franssen, Tax Compliance & Regional Operations Branch Tax Auditor, located in Oshawa, spent July 15 – 22, 2006, volunteering with Operation Blessing in New Orleans. She says that television news likes to portray New Orleans as “back to normal” in order to attract tourists. In fact, the situation is quite the opposite.

“While the situation in New Orleans is rarely discussed in our newspapers, it’s still very much in the news there,” says Franssen. “One year after Hurricane Katrina, they’re still trying to recover. In most regions, everything is still in turmoil. Newspaper articles discuss progress on everything from insurance, water, sewers, transit, infrastructure, rebuilding, volunteers coming to help with the clean up and new disaster preparedness planning.”

Franssen saw that, except for downtown and a few other areas, most of New Orleans is a ghost town. Entire shopping malls and businesses are completely deserted. There are some scattered trailers where a few residents are trying to clean up and rebuild but most neighbourhoods are abandoned.

“Few houses have any glass in their windows, or anything of value left inside. Cars, boats, and debris are scattered in the long grass. Most houses were hurricane damaged. The ones that were flooded are covered inside with black mould, which is hazardous to people’s health and causes a terrible odour”, states Franssen.

Refrigerators, freezers and even brick homes have been moved around like toy boats into unusual positions. Franssen asks, “What do you do when you come home to find a refrigerator or a large commercial ice freezer on your roof, or your new brick home is in your neighbour’s front yard?”

Franssen says, “Many people can’t get to



their homes because their neighbour’s house is now sitting in the middle of the road. One homeowner wrote the words “Through Traffic”, with an arrow to direct people to go around his house rather than through it. A lot of homes are devalued and serve as message boards rather than residences. In addition to the big X on every house, people write where they can be reached, who they’re looking for, and some more humorous or sarcastic messages.”

Homeowners must pay their mortgages even when their house is not fit to inhabit. In the newspapers a number of homes offered for sale don’t list prices. They simply say “make an offer”, “motivated to sell” or “for sale as is”. Homes not affected by flooding make a point of listing it as a “special feature”. However, several of these listings also say they have a new roof so people know it did sustain some damage from the storm.

Franssen says that the public often asks why the people in New Orleans aren’t back fixing their own homes. “At first, it sounds like a reasonable question until you realize that, in most neighbourhoods, there is no water, sewers,

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Picture courtesy of C. Franssen

Evidence of the floods from Hurricane Katrina are still evident one year later. Mud, mould and stagnate water covers every surface of damaged homes.

*Continued from page 12*

grocery stores, fast food restaurants, emergency services or gas. Some neighbourhoods have varying degrees of these services, but not all. This kind of work requires a lot of helpers, but when their family and friends have all suffered the same catastrophe, where do they begin?"

"While it's easy for outsiders to criticize the lack of progress so far, when you see the vastness of the damage, it's a lot easier to understand," states Franssen. "While people expect the government to do a lot, the government has more on its plate than it can reasonably be expected to handle all at once."

Franssen and her group spent three days dry walling and mudding a church. She said, "Since there were no grocery stores open in the area, Operation Blessing had set up a large tent in the church parking lot and was using it to distribute food to local residents daily. Residents showed valid identification to prove they lived in that parish. They were allowed to select whatever pantry food they wanted with limits on the amount of each item to ensure there was enough variety for all. For example, one household was allowed one bag of rice, one box of cereal, two canned items, ten diapers, three bottles of water, etc. At noon, there was a different hot lunch available each day."

Franssen's next assignment was to clear out the home of an elderly couple. "Since a lot of the streets had lost their signs, we had some

difficulty finding it, but the owners were able to direct us by phone. It took 10 of us an entire day to clear out most of one small house. We tried to preserve anything that was salvageable, or that we thought might be of some value to the elderly couple, but we weren't able to recover much."

"What we carried out of the house left me with a lot of questions about the health of this couple. They had left behind a wheel chair, a large oxygen tank, and other health equipment," Franssen described. "Given the state of the house when we went in, there was no way this couple would have been able to try and salvage anything. Their furniture and appliances were scattered around by the flood, blocking access to the rooms. The largest items, like refrigerators and freezers, had to be removed first. Then we shoveled out lots of mouldy, wet bits and pieces that used to be their clothing, food, and personal effects. Large sections of the ceiling had caved in and their ceiling fans looked like wilted flowers."

"It really made me think of the lack of value of our belongings," Franssen says. "While all

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Picture courtesy of C. Franssen

Black, toxic mould covers most structures and surfaces. There are few personal affects which are salvageable.



*Continued from page 13*

these things that we were shoveling out of the house were of value to the owners at one time, in one day it was all destroyed. The only thing that mattered in the end was the well-being of family and friends.”

A relative of the elderly couple told Franssen they had only recently found the remains of the elderly lady’s friend. The funeral had been held about one week before Franssen arrived.

She says, “Our third assignment sent us out as Operation Blessing ‘Bug Busters’. We were helping the City of New Orleans Mosquito

Control. Since there is a lot of stagnant water in deserted pools, there is concern that the mosquitoes will spread St. Louis encephalitis, or West Nile virus. Attempting to control mosquitoes, nearby prison inmates are raising Gambusia fish for volunteers to add to stagnant

pools. Each fish can eat between 100 to 500 mosquito larvae per day.”

When asked if Franssen would like to go back to help out again, she says,

“Definitely! What we can do in one week is insignificant in the overall scheme of things, but it makes an enormous difference to the people we help. I feel lucky to have had the opportunity to help in some small way and I realize how extremely blessed we are in Canada to be able to enjoy our homes, jobs, families and friends every day.”



Picture courtesy of C. Franssen

Large debris, including houses and vehicles, have been moved around like toys and left strewn on city streets.

Franssen’s last thought is this. “Many of us may look at the situation in New Or-

leans and think we have the answers but, after further investigation, we find out there are many complications we haven’t considered. Things aren’t as simple as they seem. New Orleans needs a lot of helpers, and a lot of prayers. It will still take many years for them to recover.”

## Health and safety

As employees, we all have a responsibility to ensuring our own health and safety in the workplace. Here are some tips of what you can look out for in your area.

### Problems with temperature

Too hot or cold? Start by checking the around the thermostat. Cabinets blocking or fans blowing on the thermostats results in false temperature readings and fools the heating/cooling system. Make sure that all thermostats are clear and not exposed to external sources that may affect actual temperature readings.

### Appliances from home

Space heaters, coffee makers, tea kettles and toaster ovens, to name a few appliances discovered and individual work stations are a fire hazard. These appliances are potential fire



hazards and have not been approved to used in the workplace. In addition, they cause a strain on the electrical system.

Appliances from home should not be brought into the workplace. During a health and safety inspection the appliance may be confiscated and only returned to the employee when removing from the building.

### Employees with disabilities

It is the responsibility of employees with disabilities to identify themselves to management and fire wardens. Find a buddy to assist you during an evacuation. Be sure to report when you have safely exited the building.

# Discover the joys of credit under control

*reprinted by request and with permission from The Credit Union, Oshawa*

If you're feeling like you can never get ahead of your monthly bills and credit obligations, you're not alone. Canadians have seen a dramatic rise in "overspending" over the past two decades. While prime lending and mortgage rates have remained low, credit card rates have stayed unreasonably high, making them hazard rather than a convenience for consumers who are unable to pay off their balance each month.

In fact, of the 50 million credit cards in circulation in Canada, nearly 22 million carry a balance which means over 40% of cardholders are paying rates that could range from 18% to 28% a month. That's double, or triple, what they could be paying and means hundreds, even thousands, of dollars of extra money out of their pockets each year. It also makes it even more difficult to pay debt down and get of the revolving door of revolving credit.

**The Credit Union offers a simple, structure solution.**

We believe there is a better way to finance vacations, large purchases, educational needs

and special projects – a personal loan from The Credit Union.

While lines of credit and credit cards are convenient, they require disciplined, self-control or you can find yourself in financial trouble before you know it. If you just make the minimum payments, it would take you years to pay it off, even if you stop putting purchases on it.

With a loan from The Credit Union, you can finance purchases and projects sensibly, pay out your revolving credit and have peace of mind that your debt will be paid down properly. Plus, you can start planning for future savings, and not always have a constant balance hanging over your head. With a loan from The Credit Union, you'll not only get a great low rate, we'll also tailor the payments to fit your budget.

*Come in, call or apply online today. We're ready to help you get off the roller coaster of revolving credit right now.*

For more information, contact Richelle Harwood, Branch Manager, at (905) 433-5305 or email [harwood@mycreditunion.ca](mailto:harwood@mycreditunion.ca).



# Humour in the workplace

Some funny quotes to get you through the day.

*“No diet will remove all the fat from your body because the brain is entirely fat. Without a brain you might look good, but all you can do is run for public office.”* - George Bernard Shaw

*“Clothes make the man. Naked people have little or no influence on society.”* - Mark Twain

*“I want to thank all the Canadians who came out today to wave to me - with all five fingers.”* - President George W. Bush during his first visit to Ottawa, November 2004

## June 23 proclaimed French Heritage Day

*by Manon Faniel, Member*

The City of Oshawa has proclaimed June 23rd as French Heritage Day. Each year, the City will recognize the French community by raising a French Heritage Flag in front of City Hall, located on Centre Street in Oshawa.



## Editor's message

I have been creating Local 340's quarterly publication, *Hidden Treasures*, for four years this coming February and have been posting to our website, [opseulocal340.tripod.com/](http://opseulocal340.tripod.com/), for just shy of two. What an incredible learning opportunity and journey it has been.

It has been my pleasure to represent Local 340 at every OPSEU's Editors Weekend since 2003 to learn a variety of skills to help communicate better with you, the members. It is my humblest honour to report that we have won four awards in three years for our publication at these conferences (I'm hoping the 2006 OPSEU's Editors Weekend, to be held November 3 – 5, will see us achieve just one more). This year, as a result of an election, I will be attending not as a participant, but as a co-facilitator. I couldn't have achieved any of these successes without the support of our members and our local executive committee. Thank you.

I'm so proud of this edition of *Hidden Treasures*. Probably more so than any other that has been released in the past four years. This summer, a Local 340 Communications Committee was formed. This will be the first publication since the formation of the committee where all have contributed equally to it's creation, instead of the responsibility being upon one person's shoulders.

While letting go of creative control hasn't been and isn't going to be easy, I recognize that, in order for our union to continue to grow and flourish, we must educate and encourage new activists. The new committee members are helping make the transition for me fairly painless. What a group of creative, talented and dedicated individuals! To Art, Genevieve, Benjamin, Kelly and Nancy, from the bottom of my heart, I thank you. I look forward to continuing to work with you and sharing with you whatever knowledge I can.

In solidarity,

*Karrie Duchas*, Editor